P. O. angl.

16r

-57

Angles

P. o. angl. 16 r

# COLLECTION
OF
# BRITISH AUTHORS

## TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

VOL. 3118.

## A POINT OF CONSCIENCE.

BY

## THE AUTHOR OF "MOLLY BAWN."

IN TWO VOLUMES. — VOL. 2.

LEIPZIG: BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ.

PARIS: LIBRAIRIE C. REINWALD, 15, RUE DES SAINTS-PÈRES.

PARIS: THE GALIGNANI LIBRARY, 224, RUE DE RIVOLI,
AND AT NICE, 48, QUAI ST. JEAN BAPTISTE.

443 F

*This Collection*
*is published with copyright for Continental circulation, but all purchasers are earnestly requested not to introduce the volumes into England or into any British Colony.*

March 1896.

# Tauchnitz Edition.

---

Latest Volumes:

(*Continued from cover of vol. I.*)

## Sons of Fire.

A New Novel by **M. E. Braddon.**

2 vols.

## The White King's Daughter.

A New Novel by **Emma Marshall.**

1 vol.

## The Long Vacation.

A New Novel by **Charlotte M. Yonge.**

2 vols.

## The Stark Munro Letters.

A New Work by **A. Conan Doyle.**

1 vol.

## Memories and Studies of War and Peace.

A New Work by **Archibald Forbes.**

2 vols.

## The Days of Auld Langsyne.

A New Work by **Ian Maclaren.**

1 vol.

## From the Memoirs of A Minister of France.

A New Work by **Stanley J. Weyman.**

1 vol.

(*Continued on page 3 of cover.*)

COLLECTION

OF

# BRITISH AUTHORS

TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

VOL. 3118.

A POINT OF CONSCIENCE. BY MRS. HUNGERFORD.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

BIBLIOTHECA
REGIA
MONACENSIS

# A

# POINT OF CONSCIENCE

BY

MRS. HUNGERFORD,

AUTHOR OF "MOLLY BAWN," "LADY VERNER'S FLIGHT,"
"THE PROFESSOR'S EXPERIMENT," ETC.

*COPYRIGHT EDITION.*

IN TWO VOLUMES.—VOL. II.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1896.

BIBLIOTHÈQUE
NATIONALE

# A POINT OF CONSCIENCE.

---

## CHAPTER I.

"Yet weep I not for human misery,
Nor for the stars' complaining,
Nor for the river's wailing.
I weep for thee alone; most miserly,
Keep all my tears for thee!"

RECKLESS, desperate, she makes her way back to the house, some last remnant of sense compelling her to hope that she may gain it without her absence having been discovered. With a view to this she enters quietly by a side-door. From this, however, she must cross the entrance-hall to gain the staircase to her room, and in this hall she finds herself confronted by—Lady Maria!

The elder woman's face is a study of suppressed anger and disgust, and the girl, after one glance at it, reads her doom. Somehow the knowledge, instead of further depressing her, raises her already overstrung nerves to a very dangerous pitch, and a mad

inclination to laugh aloud is the one desire she knows.

"Come in here," says Lady Maria, pointing to the library door.

She speaks quite quietly, but the deadly anger beneath her composure is quite clear to Miss Royce. Instead of daunting her, as I have said, it only augments the passionate rebellion in her breast. How can she, who has lost all, care for the petty wrath of this old woman?

"I thought you understood you were not to leave my grand-daughter until ten o'clock," says Lady Maria, her beautifully-modulated voice still under full control.

"I am not your grand-daughter's maid!" retorts Miss Royce insolently.

"That is quite true. You are her governess, however, and she was left in your charge. It was late, no doubt, to expect you to sit up with her; but she was your little pupil, and she was very ill."

"If the child was as ill as you seem to think," says Miss Royce, with a shrug of her slim shoulders, and a slight increase of the insolence she has already shown, "I think her mother would have been the proper person to sit beside her and look after her."

"I suppose you know," says Lady Maria calmly, "that you are being very impertinent?"

"I'm not so sure of that," says Miss Royce, with

a bitter little smile. "But I am clever enough to know that anything a person in my position may presume to say to a person in yours, calculated to offend, is always *called* impertinent, however just it may be. For the rest, I did not engage with you as nurse-maid to your grand-daughter—to see her through all her childish diseases—but to teach her her lessons."

"One of her lessons, I presume," says Lady Maria, still keeping her temper admirably, "has something to do with propriety of conduct. To be out of one's house until ten or eleven o'clock at night comes hardly under that head."

"There are times," says Miss Royce in a low, furious tone, "when everyone in this horrible world feels they must be alone!"

She stops, as if choking.

"Were you alone to-night?" asks Lady Maria mercilessly.

"What is that to you?" says the girl, turning upon her so fiercely that anyone else might have shrunk from her; but Lady Maria, her old keen eyes unflinching, looks back at her expectantly. "Would you spy upon me night and day? I tell you—and your question confirms it—I am never alone! You grudge me even a moment to myself."

This is very far from the truth, but passion now has caught and is swaying her. Lady Maria and

Mrs. Verschoyle, if cold and unbending, have always been scrupulously kind and just to her, and very considerate.

"It is Jinnie, Jinnie, all day long with you and that child's mother," goes on Miss Royce, with extraordinary violence. "What was I beside her? I, too, am a human thing, who can know grief and joy, and love and hate, as well as another; yet what was I to you? Nothing! Nothing but a machine to work your will, and look after the child you love. But it is all over—*all!*" She makes a tragic movement with her arms, throwing them out and a little upwards. "I am not your slave!"

"I am very glad to know that you are nothing whatever to me," says Lady Maria, with such perfect calm as seems actually cruel in the face of the other's passionate excitement.

"I shall not stay here," says the girl, who has grown reckless now.

"I think that very probable."

"I suppose you imagine you are dismissing me," says Miss Royce, with a sudden smile, so vivid, so contemptuous, that for the first time Lady Maria's self-possession gives way. She frowns. "But you make a mistake. It is I"—superbly—"who am dismissing you!"

Lady Maria's frown disappears. She looks amused.

"In the meantime," says she politely, "I would suggest to you the advisability of going back to your pupil's room. Mrs. Verschoyle, whose motherly instincts you seem to rate so low, has been with her the greater part of the evening. She went up there, indeed, directly after dinner—to find you gone. You misjudged her, you see, when you thought you could safely desert her child to-night without fear of discovery. Mrs. Verschoyle is not the sort of mother to leave her child entirely to the care of a—hireling!

Lady Maria feels a little ashamed of this later on—so much so, indeed, that she refrains from all mention of it to Mrs. Verschoyle.

"I shall not go back to Jinnie's room," says Miss Royce with cold decision. "Send one of your maids if Mrs. Verschoyle wants assistance. I am not a servant; and, besides"—deliberately—"I have come to the conclusion that I dislike children."

"You prove yourself not only insolent, but heartless!" says Lady Maria.

She rises and rings a bell.

"I am not heartless!" bursts out the girl violently, whose heart, indeed, at this moment is filled with almost unbearable agony. "It is *you*—and *yours*—who are devoid of all feeling! I——"

Lady Maria makes a slight but imperative gesture.

"Leave the room!" says she curtly.

It is the last straw. So might she have spoken to, so might she have dismissed, one of her housemaids.

Miss Royce stands choking with rage for a moment; then, still speechless, turns and walks, not only out of the room, but out of the house, and into the cold, sweet chillness of the night air.

* * * * *

It is very dark now. Above, the stars are all afire, and the tops of the firs are silvered by the light of the crescent moon; but down here, amongst the trees, the shadows in the thick parts of the plantation are very dense.

She had run with all the speed of an enraged creature when she had passed impetuously through the open hall door, and had not ceased to run until these shadows overpowered her; but now she pauses, hesitating a little, as if sobered suddenly by the change from light to dark, from the heat of the room behind her (how far behind her now, to all intents and purposes!) to the soft-blowing wind about her, and . . . utter desolation!

She pauses, as if trying to place things; and then suddenly it all at once comes home to her. She is alone! No home—no friends—no lover! *Nothing!* And *he*—he will be gone to-morrow! . . . She flings herself face downwards on the grass. "Thou sayest it . . . I am outcast!"

A dry, gasping sob breaks from her. Oh, dear God, to be dead, and done with it all! To cease!—to be silent, deaf, sightless, without thought!—to *feel* nothing!

For many minutes the wild, untutored heart thus beats itself out against its bars, and then she rises wearily. A sort of passionate longing arises within her to go back again to where she had last seen him, to fling herself on the damp, dewy grass, and kiss the place where his dear footsteps trod—to go where she will never, never, *never* see him again! And presently, with grief and despair and hopelessness dragging at her tired feet, she goes down to the ash grove.

Coming to the river, she pauses and watches it for a moment eagerly, hungrily, then goes on again, looking back at it now, and now again, as though it draws her to it, but still resisting it. No, no; there will be time for that . . . afterwards!

Presently she goes down the soft, deep bank, mossy and still sweet with the later autumn flowers, and now the grove is before her; and *now* . . .

She stops, uplifting her hands to her face as if to check the cry that rises to her lips—the wild outcry of joy, of passionate delight, that is making her tremble from head to foot. For there, in the darkness beyond, to which she has now grown accustomed, she can see the tiny red glow of a cigar.

He has not gone, then! He has *not* deserted her—he is still here! A thrill of rapture rushes through her. All her sadness, her depression, is gone; her eyes grow brilliant; a brilliant colour, too, springs to her pale face. Oh, what a good, what a gracious world it is, after all! *He,* still, is *here!*

Alas that it should be so! With a sob in her throat she runs to him, fleetness and fire now in her little feet, so tired a moment ago.

"Sidney!" cries she in a strangled voice; and, indeed, he has barely time to rise and catch her before she falls into his arms.

"Maden, my darling, what is it?" asks he, his voice as filled with astonishment as with anxiety. To come back again at this hour!

"I have left them for ever!" gasps she presently. "They were cruel—too cruel! I shall not go back! Take me with you, Sidney—take me!"

"This is madness!" says he, frowning but paling, as he feels the little living, beautiful creature throbbing within his arms.

"Not this," cries she, clasping him closer; "but it *will* be madness indeed for me, if you leave me here! They have cast me out—oh, those devils of women! . . . and where—*where* shall I go? . . . Besides"—with a strange and rapid change of tone—"I want to go nowhere except where *you* are, Sidney."

And now, throwing herself back to look at him: "You *do* love me, don't you?"

"You know it!"—passionately, the passion, in spite of him, breaking through the prudence that warns him that to give in now will tend to his undoing in the future.

"Ah! Then it is all right!" cries she, with the little broken, happy laugh of a tired child. "And you *will* take me with you!"

"You don't know what you are saying," stammers he, a revulsion of feeling making him put her slightly from him. "I cannot take you with me. I am at my last penny—stone broke."

"I don't care; I will work for you, slave for you, scrub for you. *Only* . . . let me be with you."

"Maden!"

"Oh, I know—I know, but I don't care!"

"This is mere temper," says Fenton. "You are angry with Lady Maria and the rest of them, but it will blow over."

Even as he thus fights against her, and against all his instincts, he wonders at himself. This girl—a mere waif and stray, or a little obscure nobody—has so far influenced him that, in opposition to his real easy-going nature, and his conscience that is easier still, he argues with her, with a view to saving her from herself and his undeniable desire for her.

"It is not that," says she. "If that were all, Lady Maria and I would have had no words to-night. But I knew, when you told me this evening you were going away, that I could not live without you. If this quarrel had never happened, I should still have followed you."

She looks at him, her eyes on his, gleaming in the moonlight—and there is no shame at all on her lovely face.

"Do you know what you are saying?" asks he hoarsely. His arms have tightened around her. "I have told you I cannot marry. If I were a rich man, Maden . . . that would make all the difference. I could then—honourably—take you away from all this misery, but———"

"I don't want you to marry me," says the girl quietly. "I don't want you even to think of anything that might chill your love for me. Let me be *with* you . . . that is all I ask."

"Is your reputation nothing to you?"

"Nothing is anything to me—but you!"

There is a long silence. Then his better angel touches his elbow once more, and surely he must, in his own careless way, have loved her above most, when he answered to that angelic suggestion.

"I cannot let you do this thing," says he.

His voice is firm again, his air resolute. He makes an effort to put her from him, but she clings

to him the more, pressing her soft lips against his cheek.

"You can—you *must.*"

"No!"

He almost flings her from him.

She catches a branch, and for a little while looks at him searchingly.

"Go, then, if you will," says she, in a low tone. "Put me out of your life, once for all. But remember"—slowly—"I shall not have the courage to face life without you."

"You will find another home," begins he, like one who does not know how to word his sentence.

She helps him here.

"You are right. I shall, indeed, and speedily. I shall find it—*there!*"

She points to the deep and flowing river to their right. There is no passion, no vehemence, in her gesture; yet a terrible certainty that she means what she says makes his blood run cold. That little slender figure . . . lying beneath the evermoving river . . . cold, senseless, with wide, dead eyes. . . .

With a stride he catches her again, and holds her to him. His heart is beating madly.

"Remember, it is your own doing," says he hoarsely, selfish to the last.

## CHAPTER II.

"Charity suffereth long, and is kind . . . rejoiceth not in iniquity . . . believeth all things, hopeth all things."

THERE is considerable consternation in the Dower-house to-day. Miss Royce is gone! Her bed had not been slept in last night, and the prettiest of her gowns is not now hanging in her wardrobe. Lady Maria, if repentant at the idea of being over-harsh to her some hours ago, is for all that very angry and disgusted.

"You know, Jane, I said nothing—nothing *really*, to drive her to running away; but, as I have often said to you, she was not a person to be trusted—to be allowed into any respectable household."

This is such an astounding piece of news, that naturally Mrs. Verschoyle grows a little bewildered.

"I quite thought you liked her, even admired her," says she at last.

"My dearest girl! Surely you forget. *I* to say a favourable word for that miserable creature, who so shamelessly neglected our poor little darling! Oh no, Jane! I certainly thought her pretty——"

"I thought her vulgar," says Mrs. Verschoyle.

"Did you? Well, this last act of hers proves it. To go like that! But of course there was a man connected with it somewhere. She was too pretty

for her station in life. You may remember a conversation I had with you about her beauty, and I told you then, my dear Jane, that it was one of my first causes for distrusting her. I quite recollect saying that that sort of person should be ugly."

It seems hopeless to argue with her, and Mrs. Verschoyle, who is wise in her generation, gives it up.

In the afternoon, Anthony, with Fenton and Mr. Browne, drop in for tea, and once again the perplexing question is threshed out to the bitter end.

"Mammy says she went away in a tantrum," says Jinnie, in the middle of a most engrossing argument as to Miss Royce's leaving thus suddenly, whereon everyone stops short, and Mr. Browne bends an inquiring glance on Jinnie.

"What sort of a vehicle is that;" asks he. Even on the most solemn occasions Mr. Browne finds a difficulty about refraining from mirth. "Two wheels or four?"

At this Captain Fenton laughs aloud, and Mrs. Verschoyle, who almost unconsciously had been studying his features, now turns aside. Oh no, of *course* not. He has had nothing to do with the girl's disappearance. He could not laugh so lightly if—— It was inexcusable—*unpardonable* of her, to have harboured such a thought for even a moment.

"I assure you, all I said was that she should not

have neglected Jinnie—that she should not have been out so late. It was quite half-past eleven," says Lady Maria, addressing Captain Fenton. "I'm *afraid* I suggested to her that she had gone out with a view to meeting somebody, and, of course, without *proof*." Lady Maria spreads her long, little, wrinkled, jewelled fingers abroad, in extreme self-depreciation. "That was abominable! I *know* she went out to meet nobody, and that temper alone has been the cause of her sudden disappearance from amongst us. Don't you?"

"I think it probable," says Fenton. "But then, you see, I knew so little of her, beyond meeting her here, and in some of the houses round."

"True." Lady Maria pauses. "I regret that suggestion of mine, however," says she presently, in a low tone.

"We must all regret," declares Mr. Browne suddenly. "Regrets come by the hundredweight. Do not, however, I beg of you, dear Lady Maria, give up too much time to the one associated with Miss Royce."

He is smiling genially, but is there meaning in the smile? Again Mrs. Verschoyle glances at Fenton, but Fenton is smiling too.

"Regret is another word for folly," says he, breaking into Dicky's disquisition. "Take my word

for it, Miss Royce knew very well what she was about when . . . Ah!——"

He stops suddenly. Cecil Fairfax has just come in.

"Is it true?" asks she, in a little grave way, holding Lady Maria's hand.

"Quite true," says Fenton, who has followed her up the room. "And I have just been allaying Lady Maria's touches of conscience by telling her that I fancy, from what *I* have seen of Miss Royce, she is quite capable of arranging her own plans. She struck me as clever. Eh?"

"What I think," says Miss Fairfax—her beautiful face still grave and anxious—"is, that she will soon come back again. It was a childish freak—a fit of anger. Oh, I hope it will be so. How"—a slight suspicion of tears gathering in her eyes—"how *pretty* she was! Didn't you"—to Fenton—"think so?"

"Yes, distinctly pretty," says he indifferently.

"You think she will come back," says Verschoyle, leaning forward.

He has been watching her face—the only face in the world for him—and has marked in it the almost divine grief and longing for the return of the girl who last night had run away from them. There is no censure in the gentle eyes—no horror, no disgust, only pity and forbearance, and a desire to see her safe once more.

"Oh, I *do*," cries she, with something in her soft voice that might almost be termed vehemence. "I feel sure of it: don't you?"

Again she addresses her words to Fenton, as if his opinion alone is dear to her, a fact that Verschoyle, with a sigh and a slight frown acknowledges. Fenton, on his part, is conscious of a sense of amusement that is not altogether without its bitterness.

"I have not studied her," says he. "But you are doubtless right. Criminals"—he laughs lightly —"always return to the scenes of their crimes. Isn't that what the sages say?"

In his soul he is hoping, and, indeed, is certain, that Maden will never again revisit Hillesden.

"Poor little girl! I liked her," says Cecil gently.

Her glance is still for Fenton, and now at last, so direct is her gaze, he loses in part his self-possession.

"So did I," returns he haltingly. "She was very original."

"*I* loved her!" cried Jinnie. "I hope she'll come back soon. She told me stories, sometimes, about fairies and things. A queen fairy there was always, and a king one, too. And the king one was like you, Sidney."

A rather uncomfortable silence follows on this, though why, no one can say. Mr. Browne, who is always full of resource, breaks it.

"Jinnie!" inquiries he anxiously, "who was the fairy queen like? Me, wasn't it? *Take time.* Sort of delicate kind of beauty like mine. Eh?"

"No, she was like Cecil," says Jinnie. "Fair and tall, and big, *big* eyes."

Cecil laughs.

"Miss Royce herself was far more like a fairy queen than I am," says she. "But you and I, Sidney, should feel complimented. Evidently she admired us both. Poor little thing! I wonder where she is now?"

"Yes—so do I," says Fenton agreeably.

"Had she any money?" asks Verschoyle, as if struck by an uncomfortable thought.

"Most fortunately, I paid her her salary two days ago," returns Mrs. Verschoyle. "So she has enough for the moment—for a little time—at all events. I am so glad to know that. Because I really think she would have gone away, even without what was owing to her, she was such a queer, proud, passionate girl."

"She left a great deal of her clothes behind her," says Lady Maria discontentedly.

"She will have to come back, so," says Jinnie hopefully. "She loved that little blue blouse with the sparky stones. Perhaps she'll come for it to-morrow."

"Perhaps so," says her mother.

But Miss Royce comes back no more to the Dower-house, and presently the delightful sensation her romantic disappearance had created in Hillesden dies away, and people begin to forget her. It takes but a very few days to do this, and, indeed, before September has half gone by us, things have settled down again. Mr. Popkin has returned to his wooing of the reluctant Carry, and Miss Langley-Binks to her pursuit of the dejected Richie. Fenton has left The Towers, with a promise to return shortly after Christmas, and a tender pressure of Cecil's cold little hands that means very little to him, but enough to her to make her dream of, and long for, the coming of the new year. Old Miss Desmond has begun to tremble at the near approach of November, when she will have to pay up that overdue old loan of twenty pounds, of which but ten is producible. And Carry—Carry has begun to put in motion the machinery of her grand plot.

## CHAPTER III.

"What thou intendest to do, speak not of before thou doest it."

THE plot itself had been maturing for a long time in her busy brain, but the winning of the tweed at the late bazaar had brought it forth. She had heard several times of how people made very handsome weekly sums out of the sale of their rabbits, and being a most excellent shot as women go, she had even tried her luck with those cunning little beasts; but somehow the swish-swish of her petticoats, go as delicately as she could, always gave them the warning signal, and the flash of their little wicked white tails was all she ever saw of them as they disappeared into their burrows. Of course, there was an occasional success, but that counted as nothing to a girl eager, and longing with an almost passionate desire, to make money out of the troublesome little wretches that destroyed darling auntie's garden—to compel them to pay off the debt that lay on the poor old lady's head, and troubled her night and day, and so put an end to it for ever. It seemed such a trivial sum. Ten pounds! Any day,

every day, kind-hearted people give twenty times that sum to deserving charities; but, then, Miss Desmond would have no charity given to her: nor, indeed, did anyone, save Richie, know of the trouble she was in. For all that she kept locked in her own old sorrowful breast.

But Carry, you see, had thought of a plan to help her—a plan that Miss Desmond would not have listened to for a single moment—at which, indeed, her decorous and beautiful old hair would have risen with horror; so Carry said nothing about it to her, and smuggled the bundle of tweed up to her own room, without so much as Miss Desmond's being aware of its presence in the house—a deceitful proceeding that became a stern duty under the severe probity of Carry's heart. If auntie cannot help herself, then, foul means or fair, auntie must be helped.

This is the evening when the successful smuggling was accomplished, and Carry, having secured her bedroom door against all intruders, lays the precious bundle on her bed, and opens it.

My goodness, what a lot there is of it! Why, there is enough here to make a dress for auntie, and a skirt for herself, besides leaving plenty over for . . . Carry sits down on the edge of her small snowy bed, and goes into agonies of silent computations.

Presently she rises, opens a drawer in the old cupboard, takes out a certain garment, and lays it

prone upon the bed beside the precious tweed. The garment shall be nameless; it might shock the sensitive nerves of a few if it was given openly to the world, and why draw unnecessary blood? Carry herself has evidently no fear of the garment in question; so little, indeed, that presently she is measuring it, and pinning some of the delightful tweed on to it, and cutting here, and snipping there, until at last the pliant tweed has grown somewhat into the shape of the "nameless thing" on the bed. There is, however, one change that must be made. Carry stands, scissors in hand, frowning over this. Yes, certainly . . . the tweed replica must be a little fuller about the kn—— But if so . . . How perplexing it is!

It is quite late before Carry goes to bed.

The delicate morning air, stealing in through her open window, wakes her. Her first thought is for her work of the night before. Flinging herself back on her pillow, she regards it with great admiration. It is hanging on the door of the wardrobe opposite, and is only pinned together, but even so it answers all her expectations.

Never again, when she goes out shooting, will she find her silly skirts knocking against, or else being caught in, the briers, and so giving those wily rabbits a chance of escape. Now they will never hear her coming. And what a good thing that Richie had taken the trouble to make her so excellent

a shot! Really, Richie is an invaluable friend; but even to *him* this must never, *never* be told. Nor to auntie, either. They—it is awfully silly of them—but she feels sure they would be mad with her. But if Richie were to see her! He might, you know. "Well"—reckless—"I don't care!"

She is out of bed by this time, and has flung her window a little wider to listen to the morning song of the world outside. Such duets, such trios! Such sad sweet monotones! All this enters into her; but presently she comes back to the mundane present. To ensure the success of her scheme she must go down to-day to old Murphy, who lives a little outside the village—old Murphy, who buys in all the rabbits, hares, wild-fowl, and so forth, for the London market, besides keeping an inn. If he will help her (and surely he will, for her father's sake), then she will take out the pins from that strange garment over there, and bind it safely together with needle and thread, and then "go a-hunting."

The afternoon sees her in the little town, close to Murphy's inn, a distinctly guilty look upon her face. It does seem a little dreadful, having to come here and ask Murphy to buy, perhaps mythical, rabbits. How can she be sure, even with the help of *it,* she will be able to shoot them? Still, Murphy, in this her hour of need, is her only refuge, and so, after a second struggle with herself, she walks up

boldly to Welcome All, as the good Murphy *now* calls his house, though once it had been only too well known as the Sign of the Flea.

Mr. Murphy, a native of Cork, had left the city of the Lee in his earliest youth, and finding himself after many years in the neighbourhood of Hillesden, with some small means in his possession, had set up there an inn, and in a moment of what he fondly deemed to be brilliant inspiration had called it by the above too suggestive title.

To him, it seemed a truly lively name for his new venture, and he quite chortled when the hanging sign, drawn and painted by a travelling "artist," was hung over his door. The artist had transformed the flea proper into a huge brown grasshopper, being perhaps too delicately minded to paint the real thing; but in spite of his noble effort towards civilisation, Mr. Murphy insisted on the name being written in clear print above (so as to avoid mistake, perhaps), and the grasshopper as he stooped, in a painfully poised position, seemed only too ready for a pounce.

Altogether it was too realistic, *too* lively, and customers fought shy of Murphy's inn—so shy, indeed, that presently the brilliant propounder of its name found himself on the brink of bankruptcy.

It was then that Mr. Desmond—who for some years had been doing his best to get through the acres of Tudor Hall—had come forward to the help

of his countryman (poor Mr. Desmond was always trying to help everyone, except himself), and, with the lavish generosity that had ruined him, had by a timely cheque set up the bankrupt Murphy once again in life. It was not money thrown away. Murphy changed the title of his house—"'Twas unlucky," he said—and called it, as a more hopeful sign, Welcome All. This the many cockneys who stayed there off and on changed to Welcome Hall, which, of course, gave it quite an astonishing push, seeming patriarchal and aristocratic. After that, indeed, Murphy had prospered amazingly, whilst his benefactor went lower and lower, until kindly death seized him.

No one could accuse poor Mr. Desmond of drinking, of gambling, or of unfaithfulness to the wife who died before him, and adored him to the last; but, still, all things went. He had run through his own property in Ireland, and then through his wife's in England, and all in the happiest way. He was one of the most regretted men, in his own world, when he died.

* * * * *

"Can I speak to you for a moment?" says Carry, walking through Mr. Murphy's door and into his shop, with all the speed and nervous energy of one who has been for hours making up her mind to a plunge.

Murphy, who is standing behind his counter,

comes quickly forward. He has small, twinkling eyes, an abominably long upper lip, and a most pleasant air.

"'Tis an honour ye'll be doin' me, miss, to spake to me at all," says he with immense bonhomie, largely mingled with respect.

He is a big man, with a wonderful stomach, and this he strokes affectionately as he regards her.

"Oh no," says Carry. "To tell you the truth, Murphy, I want you to do something for me. I"—nervously—"I'm a little troubled."

Murphy looks at her.

"Trouble is worse than murdher," says he sententiously. He opens a small door that leads from his shop to a tiny parlour within. "Come in here, Miss Carry, an' tell me all about it."

Carry follows him. The little room is neat and cosy, though a smart fire burning in the grate renders it uncomfortably warm. But the big man's face has a touch of sympathy in it that smoothes her way for her.

"It isn't *my* trouble, Murphy," says she. "It is Miss Desmond's. She——" She stammers a little.

"An' how is she?" asks the Irish giant tenderly. "Fegs, 'twas only a month ago I went by yer house, an' I saw her, an' grand the old lady looked, praise be! But if she's in any way pressed, Miss——"

"Well, she is, Murphy, and—and it has occurred

to me that I might, with your help—make things easier for her." Poor Carry's eyes now are full of tears.

"Faith, 'tis like yer father ye are," says Mr. Murphy, with quite unbounded admiration. He is leaning against his round mahogany table. To *sit* in company with a Desmond would never have occurred to him. "Ye have a plan in yer mind now, I can see, an' proud I'll be if I can help it out. Himself"—meaning the late Desmond—"was the divil all out at thinkin'. Why, I remimber"—here he grows enthusiastic—"whin the Sheriff himself came down here an' thried——" Here he breaks off suddenly, finding himself on tender ground. "Ah, he was a great man—a great man entirely!" says he, slowing off very cleverly.

At that Carry tells him that her desire, her hope, is to kill the rabbits on her aunt's property, and give them to Murphy to sell in London.

"I know you have many other people who supply you with rabbits."

"That's thrue, miss."

"And therefore I know I am a great trouble to you—even asking you to help me."

"Throuble! An' is it throuble ye'd be spakin' of to me, who would not be above ground this minnit but for yer father! Throuble isn't a word, miss, to be used between you an' Jim Murphy."

"You are kind—too kind," says Carry in a little choking way. Oh, he *will* help her, then!

"Kind! No," says Jim Murphy; "'tis yer father was kind to me. An' I'm tellin' ye this, miss, that yer father's daughther is all the world to me."

"But I want you to understand this, Murphy," says Carry, her face pale and her eyes a little strained, "that, of course, I can't supply you with as many rabbits as the others can, and perhaps——"

"Not a ha'porth o' difference would that make in my thrade," says Mr. Murphy. "One here and there can always go to market along with the others."

"One! Oh, I think I can send you a great many more than that every week," says Carry eagerly.

"The more the merrier, miss. The fac' is," says Mr. Murphy, leaning towards her, and speaking in a low voice, "that I've quite a big business in London now. But that's tellin', ye know, an' 'tis only herself"—his wife—"knows it; an' I leave it to you, miss, dear, not to repeat it, or I'd have all my prices raised wid these divils round here. Your father was a good friend to me, miss, an' Jim Murphy ain't the one to forget it; an' ye may bet yer life, miss, that I'll do what I can for ye wid the rabbits! But"—Mr. Murphy's face lowers, and his eyes seek the ground—"if I might, without givin' ye offence, say a word, 'tis that I'm sorry to me heart, miss,

that you should have to come here to-day to ask this thriflin' service of me."

"It is not trifling, Murphy, and I shall always remember your kindness," says Carry.

With a certain dignity she extends her hand to the giant before her, who clasps it as if it is an empty eggshell, bowing the while.

"I'm thinkin', miss dear," says he, having released Carry's hand, "that maybe ye'd be wantin' someone to carry down here the little bastes for ye, when kilt. An' ye know, Miss Carry, that 'tis the world an' all to git boys now to do anythin'—even barrin' the expense of payin' thim. But there's that farm on Clover's Hill, miss—ye heard I got it, belike? An' three times a week I've got to go past yer gates to reach it, an'———"

"Yes, I heard; and I was so glad you got that farm," says Carry cordially.

Indeed, there had been a rather sharp competition for the farm in question when it came to the hammer; but Murphy, who was then what he called himself in the bosom of Mrs. Murphy (who was all his family), "a warm man," had bid above all others, and so became master of the coveted bit of land.

"Thank ye, miss. Any way, 'twill make it aisy for me now to help ye in this underthakin' o' yours. I'll be at yer gates widout fail three times a week,

barrin' axidents, an' if ye can manage to send somewan to the enthrance-gate wid the rabbits to meet me on thim occasions, I'm thinkin' it may be savin' a thrifle of throuble to ye."

"You are always thinking, Murphy, of other people, it seems to me," says Carry gratefully. "You are very good to me, at all events, and I can hardly say how obliged I am." She pauses, drumming her fingers on the table. "You—you *won't tell anyone,* will you?"

"Not I, me dear—no, nor Mrs. Murphy, eyther. You aren't goin', miss, widout a cup o' tay? Herself is out, but she'll be in in a minnit, an' quite put out, miss, if ye go widout a sup o' somethin'. A glass of madeira, miss, now? Yer poor father——"

"I'm afraid I can't stay any longer," says Carry; "but you can remember me to Mrs. Murphy, and tell her I shall never forget how kind you have been to me, Murphy, and how grateful I feel."

"Arrah, nonsense, Miss Carry! an' what are ye sayin' at all, any way?" says Murphy, looking extra firm because of the tear in his eye. "Grateful is not a word, miss, from you to me—but from me to *you.* All I have in the world I owe to you an' yours."

---

## CHAPTER IV.

"Think, timely think, on the last dreadful day,
How you will tremble there, to stand exposed,
The foremost in the rank of guilty ghosts,
That must be doom'd for murder!
Think on murder!"

It is half-past five, and the pale gray light of the lovely September morning is spreading over the dull expanse of lawn that runs in its neglected fashion southward from the porch of Tudor Hall. It is now lighting up, in delicate misty fashion, the thickly-wooded sidelands that slope also southwards and somewhat to the west, and lays bare the sandy-looking soil below in the tall bracken, its green now tinging to yellow, and the small dwelling-places of those tremendously domesticated people, the conies.

The gray light, growing more mellow now (perhaps in spite of itself), is gathering round a figure standing just inside the copse on the left, and peering intently towards the lively warren below. It is seemingly the figure of a slim and graceful lad, gun in hand, and clad in knickerbockers and a short loose coat. The stout little boots that cover his feet prove the latter to be remarkably small for even a

lad of his size, and the legs, with their long stockings, are thin to a degree. On the head of this silent, watching, waiting boy sits a Tam-o-Shanter, that gives him quite a coquettish air. Boys are not, as a rule, coquettish, and thus this cap—or is it the cap, or the knickerbockers, or the entire ensemble? —gives him the air of a juvenile, if delightful, masquerader.

Bang—bang! The report rings through the still, misty air, and the boy runs sharply down the hill, to find three rabbits waiting for him—though through no over-powering desire of their own. Quickly catching them up, with a half-frightened look to right and left, he hurries up the hill again, but very little burdened by the weight of his bunnies. He has hardly reached the top, however, when a loud cry from below reaches his ears:

"Hi, there! Stop, you young rascal! So I've found you at last, have I? Stop, I say, or, by George! I'll put a few ounces into you."

For a moment the lad stops as if petrified, casts a hasty glance behind him down the hill, from whence the voice evidently comes, and then, with a vehement exclamation, flings the rabbits into a hole beneath a beech-tree—flings an armful of dried leaves over them (even in this supreme moment the young reprobate does not forget to hide them), and then races away at the top of his speed.

Excellent speed, too. It leaves the man behind —puffing and blowing up the hill—very far in the rear by the time he gets to the top of it. Perhaps rage had a good deal to do with the puffing and blowing—you know it is impossible to give a really good swear running at your best uphill—because now, when the pursuer, looking round him, sees nothing in view, no prey, not even a pair of heels, he gives way to a short and naughty word, and is evidently so much the better for it that anyone might feel quite sorry for him, in that its expression has been so long delayed.

The boy, still running, but now a long way off, suddenly finding himself in an intricate place—all briers, and trailing dog-roses that trip one's footsteps at every turn—stops affrightedly, and looks back in tremulous fashion. Not such a hero as one might imagine, after all; a very sorry coward, plainly.

"Oh, it was—it *was* Richie!"

A little turn of the head, and an overhanging bough knocks the Tam-o'-Shanter off the boyish curls, and Carry Desmond stands revealed in the tweed breeches and coat the bazaar had so kindly provided; in boots and long stockings—in fact, in a rational costume. The New Woman, no doubt, will applaud Carry. But, alas! Carry herself is ashamed of it; and yet never in her life has she

looked so well. This ought to touch the Old Woman!

The way is thorny before her, in every sense, and she makes an effort now to gather up her petticoats, so as to conquer successfully the briers in her way. But petticoats are none to clutch, and again she dashes boldly through the angry tangle, in a haste that might be called frantic, because of the fact that Richie is somewhere there behind her, and may even now be on her track.

She has picked up the cap and placed it once more upon her shapely head. Carry, who had never been regarded as even good-looking, though, somehow, everyone admired her—that is, *herself*—now, in this extraordinary costume, looks charming. Half a boy in her nature, this dress appeals to her in some strange way, so that she instinctively responds to it—and thus, delighting secretly in the part she is playing, looks better than ever she looked in all her life before. Fine feathers undoubtedly make fine birds, but poor Carry had never had fine feathers. But these new ones, that are so far from being fine, suit her, as often some chance fancy dress—hitherto the last thing that would have been thought of by its wearer—happens to be the one thing most suitable to his or her style.

"Fancy it's being Richie," breathes she, still running.

Her thoughts run with her. The rabbits, of course, are safe. He certainly could not have seen where she threw them, and this afternoon she can get them again, and leave them with the others where Murphy will find them, and take them away. It is the second week of her venture, and already she has made four pounds. Why, shortly—very shortly—she will be able to give auntie enough to pay that hateful debt—and without her knowing a word about it, too. That is the principal thing. Poor darling old auntie would be so distressed at seeing her in . . . She looks down at them.

But four pounds already!

And all honestly earned. Murphy had at first —at least, she *thought* he had at first—made an attempt to give her more than he gave the others, but she had asked about things, and now she knew it was all right. And, indeed, it was! Murphy, who would willingly have doubled the price of rabbits where she was concerned, had seen, after a short interview with her, that it would not do, and had given in. It was the easier for him to do this, in that he found she was an excellent shot. "A raal clever crathure," he called her. "An' the divil wid the gun." He was, indeed, so filled with admiration that he would fain have praised her high and low; but he knew how she felt about it, and he kept her secret as he would have kept his life.

Carry, now finding herself unpursued, continues her way more slowly to the house.

It is only a little after six o'clock. Auntie, who never rises before nine, will be safe in bed, and if she has missed getting her usual number of rabbits, still, she will gain something in the fact that she will not have to circumvent the maid-of-all-work, who is generally on the prowl when she comes home in the morning. She has been driven by this "general"—general nuisance, Carry calls her—to enter by the drawing-room window at times, the assiduity of the "general" being so great as to block the ordinary ways of doors. But this morning, if Richie has stopped her money-making, he has, at all events, made it possible to her to get back to her room unseen by anyone in these too, *too* modern clothes, and perhaps indulge in a good sleep before breakfast. Any way, auntie can't hear of her escapade *this* time.

After all, she finds the respectable doorway entrance still denied to her; the "general" had secured everything last night, and the hall door must evidently have successfully clicked after Carry's morning departure. Never mind—the drawing-room window is always a gentle friend.

She slips through it now, and through the somewhat ghostly room itself, and upstairs—one stair at a time, though really there is nothing to be afraid

of, as auntie, of course, is in her deepest slumber; and so along the corridor, and so to the turning to her own room, and so into—auntie's arms!

Not literally. . . . In this dim and darkened tiny corridor, lit by but one window at its end, and that shrouded by curtains, the light is only just visible, and Miss Desmond, in a trailing dressing-gown that has seen an eternity already, finding herself standing between the quasi light and a frightful burglar, gives way to a spirited scream.

"Stand back, fellow!" cries she valiantly, "or I'll call my niece!"

This admirable defence seems to cow the burglar. "My niece" seems, indeed, a word to conjure with. "My niece," however, is now trying wildly to slide behind a big old-fashioned stand on which some cloaks and hats are hanging. This sliding suggests to Miss Desmond the idea that he wants to get to the other side of her—her back, in fact—and there to make a speedy end of her.

"You would murder me!" cries she shrilly. "But beware! I have but to raise my voice, and a dozen minions will surround me. Go, you bold, bad man, before the worst befalls you."

Poor old Miss Desmond, her eyes now starting from her head, but her outward courage unimpaired, sees the awful thing behind the stand creeping further and further towards her, as she fondly be-

lieves; as a fact, the "awful thing" is standing stock-still, frightened out of its life.

"Ha, would you?" cries Miss Desmond. "Would you murder a defenceless lady? Then take your doom. John!"—with the air of a Viking—"call Miss Desmond! Carry!" There is real meaning in this cry. "Fly to me. Thomas! Michael! William! Ho, there! Come this way." There is not a John or a Thomas or any other man in the household, and perhaps the knowledge of this lends a truly heroic command to the old lady's voice. Perhaps it is this knowledge, too, that makes her turn to the burglar. "You hear, man? Run, I advise you, whilst you can—or would you stay here to be flayed alive? Ho, there, Thomas! run—run *this* way; you are taking the wrong turn. Here, in this corridor! And bring the gun, William—your master's blunderbuss, and his bloodhound. It will take you *all* to capture this bloodthirsty scoundrel. Carry! Carry! *where* are you?"

"Oh, auntie!" says the bloodthirsty scoundrel, whose knees are now shaking together, though it must be confessed her soul is shaking with laughter. "I am *here!* Don't you know me?"

Miss Desmond comes to a standstill; she lifts her eyes. The daylight, now growing so bold as to fight with the curtains that overhang the window, has conquered them . . . and is revealing all things.

The shabby corridor, the old woman in her even shabbier magenta dressing-gown, the disconcerted conspirator in her terrible male attire. Even in the midst of her embarrassment and genuine fear, Carry feels a sense of resentment against that magenta gown, and with the resentment knows angrily that she is rather tickled by her aunt's appearance, although, in spite of the antiquity of her garments, Miss Desmond is notably neat and nice and dainty, as she always is. Oh, well, never mind; the rabbits will make that old dressing-gown disappear into the limbo of the past, when once the debt is paid. . . . She has no time for further thoughts.

"It is you!—*you!*" says Miss Desmond, who has now drawn quite close to the terrible apparition. And then, "Oh, Carry!" cries she, in the tone of one who would say, "May God forgive you!" after which the poor, pretty old soul bursts out crying.

"Oh, auntie, don't do that!" exclaims Carry, stricken to the heart, and beginning to long, like Rosalind, for something to cover her legs. "Why—why should you be so sorry about it? After all, auntie, now, what have I done?"

"Done? Look at you! Oh no"—weeping afresh "*don't* look at yourself! Oh, what a disgrace! And you, who have always been such a good girl, Carry, and so well brought up, and now to dress yourself in—in——"

It seems impossible to her—of course, it would be impossible to any modest-minded maiden lady—to continue this sentence.

"I'm a good girl now," says Carry a little rebelliously.

"In those clothes!" Miss Desmond does not look at them, but waves a hand in their direction. "Oh, Carry, I thought you the last to so far forget yourself!"

"I have been forgetting *myself* indeed," says Carry a little bitterly. "I have been thinking only of——"

Generosity checks her. She cannot say the "you" to this trembling, frightened, and, as she well knows, adoring old woman.

"Of whom?" This hesitation has only added to poor Miss Desmond's tears. "Carry, where have you been? Where have you come from? Who—*who* have you been meeting? My darling child, confide in your old auntie. I know girls—sometimes—have lovers." Miss Desmond had not been of the lucky ones. "But what sort of man can he be, my dearest, to require you to dress up like that? Oh, he must be a most conceited fellow, to wish you to look like —like"—giving way to grief once more—"himself."

"Lovers! What on earth are you thinking of, auntie?"

Carry stares at her with unbounded astonishment.

"I am thinking of the fact of your stealing out of the house at such an early hour. Carry darling, tell me who you went to meet."

The latent sense of humour in Carry here takes fire.

"Rabbits," says she.

"Rabbits?"

"Yes—bunnies. They don't love me, however, with the ardour with which I love them. Look now, auntie; I'll tell you all about it. You know those dreadful rabbits that are always making havoc of your garden—that are even worse than the hens? Well, I had heard that Murphy—you remember him? down in the town, you know—is buying rabbits right and left for the London market; and I thought if he would buy ours it would help us a lot, and give us money to pay that abominable debt."

"Oh, my dear, that debt!" says Miss Desmond, conscious of a fresh twinge of the fear that has saddened her all the summer.

"So I went to Murphy, and he was very good about it, and seemed quite anxious for our rabbits; so I determined to shoot them."

"You?"

"Yes; why not? You know I am an excellent shot, though I say it as shouldn't. Richie taught me."

"But—but how does all this explain your present—attire?" says Miss Desmond.

"The rabbits must explain that," says Carry. "It seems they can't bear petticoats. They rustle, don't you see, and the bunnies are so wary that they can hear the slightest sound. It had to be the debt paid, auntie, or—no breeches."

This awful word reduces Miss Desmond once more to the verge of hysterics.

"Better—far better—be in debt to the end of our days than have you so lost to all sense of decency," sobs she. "Carry, take them off—take them off *at once!*" She points vehemently to the lower part of Carry's figure. "Oh, have you thought, child? Have you considered? Oh!"—incoherently —"if your poor mother could only see you now!"

Instantly Carry is conscious of a sense of deep gratitude that her mother is *not* here to see her. Memories of sound and handsome spankings come to her mind. The late Mrs. Desmond, though sweet and kind and lovable for the most part, had had at times—her moments! The gratitude therefore is permissible; though afterwards comes the comforting recollection that even if she *were* here, Carry herself would be too big (too old would have had no deterrent effect upon her mother) for spankings of any sort.

Then from mother to father her mind runs quickly. That laughter-loving, easy, happy-go-lucky father seems now almost present to her.

"Dad would have liked them," says she a little disconsolately.

She stares down at her extraordinary garments, and half unconsciously pats the lower—the most outrageous—of them with a kind, brown, friendly little hand.

"Oh, your father!" says Miss Desmond, with would-be disparagement. But all at once she, too, remembers the tender, large (too large) heart of her brother, and all his goodness to her all his days, and she lapses into silence, trying to forget how the very largeness of that heart had reduced them all to poverty. Presently she rallies. "I suppose even your father would have liked his girl to be a girl," says she.

"I think any father would like his girl to do all she could to help those she loved," says Carry.

"But not at such a sacrifice. Do you think I would sacrifice you to pay this debt? No, no! Nor would he."

"There is no sacrifice," says Carry.

"There is—there is. Go and take off those dreadful things, Carry. I cannot bear to see your face above them. I never thought I should turn my eyes willingly from your face until—now."

"Well, willingly or unwillingly, you shan't turn it from me even now," says Carry; and, with a swift

gesture, she catches Miss Desmond's face between both her hands, and compels her to look at her.

"Come, now. Did I ever look so well in my life? I should have been a boy, auntie; and if I had been, oh, how I should have plagued you! and how you would have loved my plaguing! As it is, I am only a girl, but not so useless, after all. I shall be able to pay that horrid old debt, and, as a protection against burglars, I am A1. You know how I frightened you, who are so full of pluck. My goodness, auntie! where did you learn all the bad language you hurled at me? I'm shaking still." She slips her arm round Miss Desmond's shoulders. "I remember every word of it; and in this attire, and with that slang repertory, I shall be able in the future to terrify any decent burglar out of his wits."

Miss Desmond is not proof against all this love and wit. Her last chance of dignity is to change the subject.

"You are cold, my poor child," says she, clasping Carry's fingers.

"No wonder, after the fright you gave me. But you are cold, too. I'll tell you what: I'll light a fire, and get us both a cup of tea."

"But—but you'll change your—your—your things first," says Miss Desmond, who cannot bring herself to call them clothes, and is greatly afraid lest the maid may meet Carry.

"Of course. It won't take long. Now go back to your bed, and get warm. But kiss me first"—laughing—"to show there is no ill feeling."

Miss Desmond enfolds her in a loving embrace, pushes her from her, cries "Hurry!"—then pulls her back again. The eternal feminine has risen to the surface.

"Where did you get them?" asks she.

---

## CHAPTER V.

"When youth and beauty meet togither,
There's worke for breath."

For quite two weeks Richard Amyot had been hearing from different sources that there was poaching going on in the rabbit-warren at Tudor Hall.

"Nonsense," said he at first to his old factotum, who was his bodyguard, his gardener and his steward in one.

"They do say it's a fact, sir—and they two pore ladies all alone there. Shame to 'em! says I."

The "two pore ladies" might have resented this speech, but it was not meant for them.

"But what have you heard?"

"'Tain't I who've 'eard—I'm short o' hearin'; but Plowden's man he do say as there's firing in that wood from five o' the clock out."

"Well, there's firing in most woods," said Richie, who, however, was beginning to feel angry.

"Ah, ye'll have yer joke, sir. But it's gun-firing they speaks o'. And with the old lady there 'tis enough to frighten her out o' her life—the very sound o't."

In spite of his jesting, Richie's blood took fire there. To frighten an old lady, that was bad enough for hanging; but to poach on the lonely, unprotected grounds of a poor old lady, ah! that would require hanging and quartering—only quartering first. Richie grew bloodthirsty; but he was determined to say nothing to Carry about this miscreant—this abominable poacher—lest she should tell Miss Desmond, and so give the dear old thing unnecessary anxiety, because, of course, it could soon be put an end to. He would see to it.

And he was as good as his word. Once, indeed, in "seeing to it," he almost came upon the poacher, and, but for an untimely trip over a fallen root, would have caught him. But the rascal was fleet-footed, as rascals, of course, must be, and so he had lost his chance.

But chances are in abundance so long as the morning light lasts, and to-day it is lasting excellently as he trudges in secret fashion through the outlying woods that surround the warren. A pretty penny, no doubt, that fellow is making out of poor Miss Desmond's rabbits, while she—she is trying to make both ends meet, and to pay that dolorous debt besides. At this point Richie used to laugh a little. As if he could let her want for a paltry ten pounds! He has saved five already (alas, poor

Richie! you have grown a little shabby of late), and the sale of that strawberry heifer next month——

'Sh! what is that?

A breaking of twigs, but very delicately . . . And now a dead silence. Richie stands still, crouching somewhat behind the bracken. He glances over it—the rabbits' favourite feeding-place—and sees twenty-five or so of those small, nibbling things hop into the open. Then a shot . . . another. . . . And then two bunnies lie prone upon the ground.

"A bad day's work for our poacher," says Richie, with a vicious smile. "I'd have done better in one shot."

He is running, whilst he speaks, sideways through the tangle on his left, instead of straight across the warren as he did last time—and which he then recognised to be a mistake—and now, rounding a little, pauses a moment.

Yes; there, coming up the slope, the two rabbits on his arm, is the poacher. At once he knows him as the lad who had escaped him last time. Leisurely, as if a little tired, and yet with the spring of youth in his footsteps.

"Well, I have you now, gun or no gun," says Richie, setting his teeth; he had not thought of bringing his own with him.

Making a slight détour that he knows will bring him face to face with the poacher in two minutes,

he goes forward. He has calculated to a nicety Here is the open spot into which he is to advance and secure that daring young scoundrel, and now—now his footsteps can be heard—and now——

"Hah, I have you at last!" cries Amyot furiously, starting forward. Battle is in his eye, determination in the arm advanced. The arm has, indeed, almost clutched the poacher, when suddenly it drops as if paralysed to its owner's side. "Carry!" says he.

Women, as a rule, bear small shocks better than men. Carry, finding that the earth will not open and swallow her up, thinks of the next best thing, and finding a dense mass of nice clean bracken near her, drops her gun (which providentially does not go off) and subsides into it without a second's hesitation.

"It is you, then," says Amyot, advancing ruthlessly towards her, in spite of her evident desire for seclusion.

"Stay there—don't come a yard nearer," cries Miss Desmond with authority, largely mingled with fear. "Stay there, Richie, I command you."

"You are ashamed of yourself," says Mr. Amyot sternly. "And no wonder. So it was you I chased the other day—you, posing as a poacher!"

Words fail to express his disgust. Carry, raging under it, grows defiant.

"So it was," says she. "And it was *you* who threatened to put ounces of lead into me."

"Oh, that's all very fine!" says Richie, stammering a little, however. Good heavens! fancy his having even thought of taking a pot shot at Carry! "You —you laid yourself open to it, you know. It was your own fault."

"Oh, don't let us have the old Eve story over again," says Miss Desmond, her voice contemptuous and strong still, even from the lowly position she has been obliged to assume.

"Well, why did you run?" asks Richie.

"I suppose a person can run if she likes. I might as well ask you, Why did you run?"

"To catch you."

"Me! are you sure it was me?" Her tone now is malicious.

"If not you, the poacher you pretended to be. Oh, of course, you think you have the best of the argument, and all that . . . and I don't see how any fellow could state his case to you, whilst you are sitting there buried up in those ferns. But you know very well I never meant to fire at you, and that I came here only to protect your interests and Miss Desmond's, and jolly sorry I am I ever took the trouble."

He turns indignantly, as if to march off.

"Richie! wait a moment."

"What for? If I thought you were going to explain——"

"Well, I am," says Carry, though without meekness. "You are bound to hear about it sooner or later any way, from auntie, so I may as well have the first of the story."

Then she gives him a little rapid sketch of her doings (her misdoings, according to auntie), and the fact that already she has had as much money from Murphy as will enable her shortly to pay the remaining ten pounds of auntie's debt. The end of her tale leaves Richie filled with remorse and admiration.

"Why didn't you suggest this plan to me?" says he reproachfully. "I could have come and shot them for you."

"You, who are so hard-worked already? Oh no. . . . And, besides, I quite looked forward to the honour and glory of doing it all myself. And now" —sighing heavily—"now I find I have done very little beyond making you and auntie angry with me."

"Angry! I angry! Not much," says Richie emphatically. "I think you are a regular heroine. But how on earth did you make the clothes? Stand up, and let us look at them."

"Oh, I couldn't," says she, getting a little deeper into the bracken, and evidently covered with confusion.

"Why not?"

His tone has now changed from the remorseful one to one of open curiosity.

"Oh, I don't know."

"Do, any way," says he. "I want to see how you look."

"Oh, horrid, horrid!" murmurs she, gathering her arms tightly round her knees, as if to hide them from him.

"I don't believe it, Carry. If you won't get up of your own accord, I shall make you."

With this he catches her from behind, and lifts her forcibly to her feet, she distinctly protesting, yet struggling with a desire for laughter all the time.

Then a little silence ensues. Carry, standing perforce before him, shrinking, blushing, uncertain, longing for the old, dear wishing-cap of her fairy-tales to come and hide her, is still intent upon the study of his face. What will he say—think? How will he take it?

He takes it with a roar of inextinguishable laughter.

Carry frowns and draws back.

"What are you laughing at?" demands she vehemently.

Amyot struggles with his mirth, which has now grown almost tearful.

"At you," gurgles he. "Oh, Carry, if you could only see yourself and how funny you look!"

"I'd rather look funny than like a fool," retorts Miss Desmond, with pardonable rudeness, considering all things. With this she turns and makes for home.

"Where are you going? Carry, wait."

"What for?" demands she in turn. "To be insulted again?"

"Insulted! Nonsense!" He has run after her, and caught her arm. "Who's insulting you? Not I. Besides, I haven't half admired your costume." He stops short, that old wild mirth possessing him again. "They are excellently cut," says he, his voice shaking. "The *tout ensemble,* indeed, is beyond reproach. You should cock the cap a little bit, Carry, and——" He gives way altogether here. "Oh, Lor'! If Popkin could only see you now!" says he.

"Mr. Popkin is quite welcome to see me," says Carry, with extraordinary dignity—"he or any other man! I should not be afraid of Mr. Popkin's judgment. *He* has *some* common-sense, *some* intellect!"

"Has he?" says Richie, in the tone of one to whom a new and impossible view of things has been presented.

"Oh, I knew how it would be with you," declares Carry with bitter denunciation; "what you would think, with your silly old notions. That's why I sat

down amongst those stupid things"—pointing to the unoffending bracken, which, indeed, looks rather the worse for wear—"when I saw you coming. You are the rudest man I ever met in my life."

"Oh, I say!"

"Yes, you are! There is no one on earth so rude as you are. No matter what you thought, you shouldn't have said anything."

"But I didn't say anything. Now what"—aggrievedly—"did I say?"

"Enough"—stiffly—"in my opinion." She flings up her head, and prepares for a fresh departure.

"You're wrong—quite wrong," cries he. "Come back, Carry."

"Why should I?" She turns to look at him, and there is withering question in her eye. "To be made a jest of again? To afford you more amusement? *You* may regard me as a merry-andrew if you like, but I——"

"I don't. It is not like that I regard you. Rather like a new——" He hesitates as if struggling with his brain.

"Woman"—sarcastically.

"Not a bit of it. What's the name"—impatiently—"of that girl in Shakespeare who goes about in—er—*you* know! You remind me of her."

Carry pauses. Does he mean it? Certainly there is a change in his tone.

"I told you you were wrong," goes on Richie eagerly. "I declare honestly, I never saw you look so nice before."

"Then why"—only half mollified—"did you laugh?"

"That's it. Can't you see? The fool 'who came to scoff remained to pray,' or praise, rather. I felt mad with you at first—I confess that—but now that I know all, and have seen you. . . . Look here, Carry, so far as I think, you ought never to dress any other way but that."

"You mean it? Really?" Carry's face is a picture of delight and content. Her flagrant, open pleasure at his flattery might be amusing, if it were not so very pretty.

"I do indeed. And the little cap suits you, too. And so you are making money by the rabbits?"

"I am, really. Of course it is slow work, but——"

"I'll tell you what. I'll come and help you. Two guns will be better than one, and if I tell them *I'm* shooting your rabbits, it will put an end to all gossip." (One might have thought it would give rise to it.) "Will you be here to-morrow morning?"

"At six sharp. It's awfully good of you, Richie, and I'll be looking out for you. And—and I don't feel anything like so uncomfortable about wearing these things now."

## CHAPTER VI.

"And if you knew what jubilees
Begets, in sad souls, a friend's glance,
You'd look up where my window is,
As if by chance!"

At six *sharp* Mr. Amyot has been found in the woods of Tudor Hall during the past fortnight. To-day, even at half-past six, the light is a little uncertain, and so he and Carry find their shooting bad. So bad, indeed, that now they have decided on letting the bunnies go free for another twenty-four hours—a decision arrived at very cleverly, as the rabbits, on their first ineffectual shots, have retired into their dens, apparently for ever!

"The season's over, Richie," says Carry disconsolately, subsiding on a bank beside him.

"Not *yet*. This is an exceptionally dark morning."

"No, it's over. You mustn't think I'm despondent. I've got more than enough now to make up auntie's bill, but . . . And even if I can't make any more money for her now, Richie, I can in the spring. The light will come back again then."

"In the spring! Oh, hang it all, that would not be fair sport," says Richie.

"Not fair?"

"To the rabbits. That's their close season, you know."

"Oh, I see. I"—very penitently—"quite forgot. The poor little ones, if their mothers were shot, would have to die of starvation."

"And so would your clients in town, later on."

"Die! My clients there! *Why?*" says Carry, a little startled.

"Can't you see? It is really murder on a most tremendous scale. I shouldn't go in for it, Carry, if I were you. If the mother rabbits are killed by you, their babies die then, and you will be not only guilty of the deaths of those innocents, but of all the middle classes of England, as there will be no rabbits left to supply their daily needs."

This extraordinary pleading goes to Carry's heart.

"I shall certainly not shoot rabbits when their little ones want them," says she. "And, any way, Richie, I think it is a cruel sport. Only that auntie might be made happy, I would not shoot them at all. Come, let's forget it; sit down here"—motioning him to a seat beside her—"and let us talk of something pleasant. How are you getting on with Aurora?"

"Do you call that pleasant?" asks Amyot with distinct indignation.

"Why not, Richie? You should not take it like that. *I* am your friend if anyone is, and besides——" The girl's soft, wide, frank smile (a little sad, perhaps) touches him. "I can feel for you. If *you* don't want to marry Aurora, *I* don't want to marry Mr. Popkin, and yet—I'm going to."

"To marry him—that scarecrow?"

"Yes, isn't he like that?" says Carry, sighing. "But what's the good"—mournfully—"of our calling him names? I've called him a *lot* of them myself, but they don't help me a bit. I'm sure I'll have to marry him, Richie, at last. You see, I may be able to save auntie *this* time, but next year—or the year after——"

"It's abominable," says Richie angrily. "Good heavens, to have to marry a thing like that! Why, his legs rattle in his trousers, and his chin is nowhere. Don't be a fool, Carry!"

"I know a fool as well as you do," says Carry dejectedly, "but, my goodness! what am I to do? Auntie's debt can be arranged this time—it might even be arranged again; but the lease of this place will be up next September, and then——" She stops as if suffocating. "Then we must turn out, auntie and I, and—— What on earth is going to become of us?"

"Still, if you wait, something might—surely *something* might happen."

"Wait! I'm not of the Micawber tribe," says she. "*Wait!* Why, I've waited now for ten long years, and nothing has happened to help us. No one has come forward to do us any good. No one has even gone so far as Mr. Popkin, who has asked me to marry him! After all"—with dismal gratitude—"I suppose I ought to be thankful to him; small mercies are better than none; only—I'm not."

Richie sits still, his face troubled.

"Ten years! That's nonsense, you know," says he. "You couldn't have been waiting for anything when you were nine."

"*Couldn't* I? Little you know about it! I've always been thinking of how to get rich. But I'm likely"—with a forlorn shake of her head—"to wait for ever in this forsaken place. Riches are the only good; I'm going to insist on their putting that on all the new copy-books at the school below, but I'm afraid the grammar is queer. Not that I care for money, Richie, really—only, if I had it, I'd love it."

"Well, I don't see where you are now," says Amyot, in an aggrieved tone. And, indeed, this very contradictory speech might have puzzled most people.

"I want to help auntie, for one thing—to get

out of debt *for ever,* for another. It's quite plain," says Carry. "But it will never be, if I don't accept Mr. Popkin's handsome offer to provide for me and auntie for life. . . . I told him I *should* have auntie to live with me—with a view to choking him off, but it had the contrary effect. He seemed quite wild with delight at the idea of supporting auntie."

"Perhaps he's made a mistake," says Richie; "has mixed up one Miss Desmond with the other, and in his heart loves auntie."

Here they both give way to most irreverent laughter.

"Too good to be true," says Carry presently, her mirth subsiding before the awful possibilities of the future. "Well, if I refuse him, I shall still wait for something better that may never come: and wait —and wait until—— After a while auntie says my charms will wane. Never mind the charms"—breaking into irrepressible mirth—"they exist only in auntie's imagination; but—*isn't* she a dear? So quaint, so charming!"

"I gave Miss Desmond credit for more sense," puts in Richie, interrupting her a little rudely, it must be confessed.

"More sense! Oh, Richie!" She casts a disdainful glance at him. "She is full of it."

"Not if she tells you such very *untrue* things."

"I don't know. It's not so untrue, after all,

Richie." Carry, crossing her long and slender arms over her knees, looks into space. "In four or five years more I shall be quite an old, *old* thing!"

"Even so," says Richie—"though it's about the worst lie I've ever heard—you would still be too good for Popkin! So you might as well wait till then."

"Ah, but *he* mightn't!"

"Rot!"—eloquently, if vulgarly—"I should think he *would,* and only too gladly."

Carry laughs.

"Why don't you make that bargain with Aurora?" says she. "Perhaps she would wait, too."

"I haven't made the first bargain yet," says Richie gloomily. "And I declare to you, Carry, when I do, I think the same hour will see me put a cartridge into my good old gun, and fire it into my brain."

"Oh, Richie!"

"I shall excuse the fact to myself, at all events, by knowing that I must have gone mad!"

"You oughtn't to talk like that," says she sharply.

"Why not!"

"It's wrong. It's wicked. I should be a great deal angrier with you, Richie, only you know you don't mean it."

"Do you? I don't," says he moodily.

"You aren't an idiot, are you?" says Carry angrily. "Why, look here, if you would rather die than marry

her, why die? *Don't* marry her! Even to be a cowboy, though that is awful, would be better than being dead. But at the same time, Richie, she is not so bad as you think. Why, you yourself, only a few weeks ago, said she was a 'decent enough sort of a girl.'"

"Did I?"

"Yes, of course you did."

"I never saw anyone more anxious to see me made wretched than you are," says Richie reproachfully. "You're worse than the Dowager."

"I'm not, Richie—I'm not indeed!" exclaims Carry, cut to the heart by this speech. "And to prove it, Richie, if you really feel that all the money she has, and the restoration of the old place, could not compensate you . . . for—for other things . . . why, go away and *be* a cowboy—though that will make auntie and me very sorry."

Her nice, kind, earnest eyes are wet.

"You mustn't be sorry," says Richie. "Even if I went there—to California—I'd be sure to come back to you after a bit—perhaps with my pile made: who knows?"

Carry shakes her head. She evidently doesn't believe in cowboys.

"Well, I needn't be a cowboy, if it comes to that. I——" He pauses. "I—I could enlist, you know, if that would suit you better."

"Enlist?"

"Yes. It is such a comfort to talk to you, Carry; one can discuss things with you, and I've never had a mother or a sister, or even a cousin. But you are just like a sister . . ." He moves nearer to her, and tucks his arm comfortably round her neck. "I'm sure, whether I'm a cowboy or a soldier, I don't know what I shall do without you."

"I'm glad you feel like that," says Carry, slipping her arm round his waist, "because it's just how I feel to you. *I've* never had a brother, and you—you just fill the place."

"It's a splendid thing to have someone that one is really fond of to speak to," says Richie, sighing, and drawing her nearer to him (there isn't much occasion!).

"And who is fond of one," supplements she.

"Ah! that's half the battle. And when one knows people ever since one was born——"

"Oh, you're wrong there," says she, loosening her arm *slightly* round him. "You were born long before I was." The woman has asserted itself, even in the boyish Carry.

Amyot laughs.

"Five years," says he—"*nothing* nowadays. Would you make me out a Methuselah? Well"—going back to his subject—"what would you have me be?"

"Not a cowboy, any way," says she. "You spoke of enlisting."

"Yes. I expect it will come to that."

"Lucky you! I wish *I* could!"

"Well, so you can—now!" He gives a swift but eloquent glance at her present "get up." "As you *are,* you'd make a firstclass young Volunteer; and even in the Regulars there would be no one to touch you in your regiment, I'd lay a bet!"

"I suppose you think you're funny," says Carry, rising with excessive dignity—a dignity that would have been perfect if only those beastly things had come down a bit lower. But they were born so! "*I* don't! And, any way, I'm going home now."

"I'll go with you," says Richie.

"Certainly not!"—stiffly. "It would put auntie out very much."

"Nonsense, Carry! As if I am not always with you!"

"It isn't *that*"—frowning—"but in these clothes——"

"She is bound to know that I know, sooner or later."

"Better later; and, any way, she has not ordered breakfast for you."

"Nonsense again! Breakfast for two is breakfast for three; and, though you are so dreadfully inhospitable, I know Miss Desmond will give me some-

thing to eat. Besides, I'm starving, and it's a long way back to my place."

"Well, come," says Carry.

She laughs, and the ice is broken. The ice is always brittle with Carry.

## CHAPTER VII.

"Oh, tell me less, or tell me more."

"Do you remember," says he presently, "something I said to you before the bazaar? We were out fishing, I think, and I asked you what you were going to wear at Cecil's stall. I don't know what you said, but I recollect quite well saying that a rational costume of some sort would suit you down to the ground."

"Yes, I remember. But you did not mean anything; you couldn't"—going back in her mind to that remote hour—"have meant anything."

"No—a stray shot only. However, it was a good one."

"What *did* you mean by it?"

She is a little sore still.

"What I mean now—that it is awfully becoming to you."

Carry laughs in spite of herself. Compliments to her are always a superior kind of joke—nothing more.

"I'll have to leave it off very soon," says she; "there is no light in the early mornings now. To-

day, only that you were there, I should have gone home at once."

"Why not try the evenings? Best time of all for rabbits."

"I couldn't," says she, shrinking a little. "People might be about then; and, besides, there is very little light in the evenings, either."

"Well, that's true."

"Anyhow, I have made the ten pounds," says she, with a sudden touch of eager delight, "and auntie is released from her present fears, whatever the future may bring."

They have come in view of the house by this time, and on the doorstep a small and dainty figure may be seen standing, her hand to her brow, scanning the landscape o'er.

"That's auntie! My goodness! why has she got up at this hour?" says Carry, stopping short. "She *hates* to see me in these clothes, and to see me with *you,* Richie—that would mean perdition! *You* must go that way"—pointing to the yard—"*I* this way. Like Philip of Macedon and somebody else, we shall probably 'meet anon.'"

She runs quickly through the laurels on her left, that effectually hide her from the anxious figure on the hall doorsteps, and, making a little turn, afterwards reaches the library windows, and, scrambling through one of them, glides up the old staircase,

going softly, lest a rustle should betray her, and so reaches her room in safety.

A rustle, indeed, might have betrayed her! She knows this as, with a step as swift and nimble as a cat, and a hysterical desire for laughter, she goes upstairs and disappears round its ancient curves almost before a looker-on could imagine she had been there.

Certainly auntie had been on the lookout for her. Auntie has been *uncertain* about her morning sleeps ever since she first found Carry had gone in for shooting. But to-day of all days, what on earth had waked her? Very awkward, too, because perhaps, if she (Carry) had been seen with Richie, auntie might have blamed Richie in a way, and said little unkind things to him—that is, if auntie *could* be unkind to anyone.

In her room now, Carry tears off the objectionable garments, dives into the orthodox respectable ones, and, after a glance at herself in the cracked old glass, runs downstairs again.

The hall door is wide open; the light is rushing into the old hall, and a breeze with it. The breeze is a little cold, a little raw—a forerunner of the wrath to come, when winter will be full upon us.

Yet, in spite of this chill, this sudden rising of the wind, old Miss Desmond, who has the courage

of her race, stands motionless, looking always down to that point where the rabbit-warren lies.

Suddenly two small but capable hands are laid upon her shoulders.

"Auntie!"

Miss Desmond turns with a little cry.

"Oh, my darling girl, you have come home at last! Oh, Carry, I can't bear this shooting business! *Where* have you been?"

"Why out," says Carry.

"Rabbiting?"

"I am afraid I can't say that, I shot so few—fewer"—brightening—"than I shot yesterday. *Ten* brace, then! How's that for a silly young maid?"

"Oh, I think maids should not shoot at all," says Miss Desmond reproachfully.

"Then other maids could not live," says Carry. "But, auntie darling, what are you doing here at this hour? Why aren't you in your cosy bed, eh?"

"Why aren't *you?*" asks Miss Desmond sadly. "Carry"—the old lady's tone grows tragical—"don't try to deceive me. You *can't* like murdering those poor little creatures down there; yet you are doing it, to save me from dishonour. Oh, my darling, I know all! Do you think I can sleep when I know you are out there, destroying your youth and your beauty in a desire to help me? Oh, no, Carry! Last night I went to sleep, but my sleep was troubled,

and all at once I felt you were not in the house, and———"

"You must not have any more such feelings," says Carry, drawing her into the dining-room—"no, not another! For one thing, the season is over for me, because I can't shoot in the dark; and, besides, I've made the ten pounds you and I want; and for the rest, I find I'm not a born murderess—at least, not until I *must* be one again!"

She pauses, her voice has broken.

"Carry, Carry!" says her aunt, catching her in her arms.

"Oh, it's done—it's done now!" says Carry, bursting into a passion of tears. "But I can't kill them again. No"—vehemently—"*never*. Their eyes, their poor little kicking legs———" She pulls herself together by a gigantic effort. "You're shivering, auntie—so am I. These sunny mornings are a fraud; and, besides—I met Richie just now coming home, you know"—with a sob—"and he said he hoped you would give him some breakfast."

"Richie!"

"Yes—and he told me he was awfully hungry. What is there?"

"Eggs," says Miss Desmond tragically.

"That will do,"—thoughtfully—"with a little bacon. And I think I'll light a fire in the dining-room, auntie. I—I think he is out there somewhere,

and if he feels as like a frog as *I* do, he will be glad to see a fire somewhere."

She looks out of the window.

"Ah! there he is——"

"Is he?"

Old Miss Desmond looks out, too. And there he is, beyond doubt. She throws up the window.

"Come in, Richie. Come in, my dear. Why do you stay there?"

"I'm coming," cries Richie heartily; and in another moment he is within the hospitable if barren house. And, indeed, it is Richie in the long-run who lights the fire, and helps Carry to cook the admirable dish of ham and eggs that presently comes upstairs.

---

## CHAPTER VIII.

"Fragile beginnings of a mighty end!"

So Carry made the ten pounds that sets poor old Miss Desmond's heart at rest—for a time; and so the world goes by Hillesden, so swiftly, so monotonously, that it is with a rush of wonder that one wakes to know that winter is over, and "spring has come up this way" once more.

Only the bare beginnings of that loveliest of all seasons—a mere baby of a thing, very delicate, but full of sweet life, for all that, and with a great promise in it of better things to come.

Already in hedgelands, and such wild enchanting ways as hide the violet and the "rath primrose," tokens can be met with, every day, of their coming; although as yet February has only dawned, and fires are lit in all the rooms, and one goes about shivering, wrapped up in silks and furs. But time, though it has carried us thus far, has failed to show the right or the wrong of Miss Royce's going. It has, indeed, told nothing at all about her.

This chilly February has brought Sidney Fenton to The Towers again straight from Dublin, where he

has been quartered for the past five months. It has brought Mr. Browne there also, why he hardly knows himself, as his invitations for that month if put together would make him a complete—if scarcely decent—suit of clothes; and, really, to go to the same house twice in a year argues the coming of old age! Still, a distinct friendship for Anthony Verschoyle, that almost reaches the word affection, has swayed his decision. He is very desirous of Anthony's happiness, and two or three things during his late visit showed him where that happiness lay. But there seemed to him to be a little hitch, a little uncertainty about it, and—well, he told himself, it was curiosity alone made him accept Anthony's second invitation to The Towers.

So the spring has brought him, too, to Hillesden; and more than that! It has brought Jinnie to a state of overflowing energy very difficult to combat. Even Miss Royce's successor, an excellent person of uncertain—or, rather, very certain—age, with admirable testimonials, and a wart on her nose, is unable to control her. Jinnie, who has never ceased to regret Miss Royce—whose supervision, indeed, had been ever of the lightest, and who had let her go her own way, in the kindest fashion, so long as it did not interfere with hers—naturally detests the "new woman," and gives her, it must be confessed, an uncommonly bad time.

Besides the guests I have named for The Towers, there are a good many others expected there. Amongst them, Sir Reginald Baring, the distinguished painter, and Lady Audrey Osborne, a pale, haughty old maid, of even *more* certain age than Jinnie's governess, and a cousin of Verschoyle's; she was in the act of being painted by Sir Reginald in town, and anxious that nothing should prevent the world —*her* world—from seeing her angular attractions in Burlington House next season, had written to Anthony to give her house-room whilst Baring was with him.

Who has the pluck to refuse an unmarried woman anything? I have heard of married women being rather unhandsomely treated; but, after all, that discovery carried its excuse with it—there was a man to her back. But the spinster! Anthony, who did not want to entertain Lady Audrey, although she was his cousin, wrote her a most cheerful answer, giving her to understand he would be charmed to receive her, and having posted the letter, felt like a hypocrite for three hours.

Having told this deliberate lie, and on paper, too, and knowing that Sir Reginald is coming, Sir Anthony goes down to his mother's; where, being her day, a considerable number of people have assembled, Mrs. Berkeley and the Langley-Binkses amongst others.

"Baring is really coming this time," he tells his mother; "you know he disappointed me before, the time of the bazaar, on account of influenza, but he can be depended upon now. Good heavens!"—his voice breaks off and he frowns slightly—"how far off that bazaar seems!" He stops, frowning still, but in a thoughtful way.

Mrs. Verschoyle, who is near Lady Maria, after a hurried glance at him, tells herself there is pain in his thoughts.

"When are you coming to spend a 'long and happy day with me in the country'"—quoting idly —"to meet him, mother? He is an old friend of yours?"

"And a delightful one," says Lady Maria, "though I'm afraid I'm too old to amuse him now, whatever I might have been twenty years ago. Shall we say from Saturday to Monday, then?"

"From Saturday to Monday week, rather! Baring has come to study children in their first stage, and as he is himself a little overdone, he had better do it here with the fresh air and that."

"Decidedly better. Have you provided a child?"

Jinnie, who has been sitting on her grandmother's knee, here steps off it.

"*I'm* a child," says she, with enormous dignity, and in her sharpest treble; "I'd like to be painted—but not too *much!* Not like Mrs. Berk——"

Here several people fall upon her bodily, and choke off the awful termination of her sentence. *Who* is painted too much? All refrain from giving even an *eye* answer to the question—that is, as much as possible! Here and there, it seems, it isn't possible. The flesh is weak!

"Dicky Brown will be with us, too," says Verschoyle, breaking into the dreadful pause; "also Anstruther, and others. You *must* come, mother. How can we get on without you?" He turns suddenly to Cecil—"We can't get on without you, either; you will promise to make up our house party. I can depend upon you?"

"You can indeed," says Cecil, laughing. "I know your house parties of old." With the sweetest smile she turns to him: "I think I should have gone to you, even if you had not asked me."

Anthony gives her a strange, sad, questioning glance for answer, then turns to his mother.

"Saturday next, then? And with an indefinite end to your visit?"

Lady Maria laughs and shakes her head at him.

Yes; she will go to him, but only for the time specified. And she will depend upon him to bring all his guests down to dine with her on Wednesday. She would like to do something for his guests even in a *little* way, and especially for Sir Reginald. As

for Lady Audrey—well, she seemed a kind creature, if a little——

Lady Maria, as usual, has her own way, and to-night there is a dinner at the Dower-house, given specially, as she said, for Sir Reginald Baring. Jinnie, I regret to say, has been given a promise that she shall come down to dessert. This was at Lady Maria's urgent request, a request given in to only too readily by Jinnie's mother—who had been interviewed by Jinnie five minutes before—and who is as bad as the child's grandmother in the way of denying her dead husband's child nothing. Jinnie of late has been permitted to come down to dessert every night—"*small* nights," she calls them—but to come down to a "big night!" this fills Jinnie's soul with glee.

Besides, she will meet Sir Reginald, with whom, contrary to all expectations, she has become quite a boon companion.

He has been painting, during the past days, a little naked baby of two years, belonging to one of Anthony's tenants; and Jinnie, a charmed spectator, has been permitted to sit quietly in a corner during the proceedings. She has made herself even useful —Jinnie *useful!*—by keeping the baby in humour!

Lady Maria had been not only enchanted, but almost insufferably proud, at Jinnie's success in this

art! She had kept the baby good all to-day, when even its own *mother* had failed.

"Oh, that child is full of promise," said Lady Maria to Sir Reginald, when he told her of Jinnie's prowess in the painting field of his studio. And indeed she is!

* * * * *

No wonder, then, that Jinnie is looking forward to this "dessert" with Sir Reginald, who has praised her high and low since his arrival.

It is not time for her to come down yet, however, and in the meantime conversation is flowing freely.

Mrs. Berkeley, as usual, is talking at the top of her extraordinary falsetto. She is sitting on Mr. Browne's right, but on her left is an elderly gentleman of huge dimensions, generally and specially in that part that Mr. Browne very rudely alludes to as his "tummy." Her Infantry boy having deserted her for younger and fairer charms, she has now dedicated herself to the more mature, the less beautiful, but decidedly the richer, Mr. Shine. He is an Anglo-Indian, fifty or thereabouts, and fabulously rich, say some people.

"Dreadful dull, the country." She is talking to Mr. Browne *for* Mr. Shine (a little trick some people have), with her best Society air—the air that verges on boredom. "Specially in this part down har."

(She means "here.") "They really don't seem to know what day of the week it is, or the hour! Never saw people so dead-alive. Give something to shake 'em up a bit."

"How would you begin, for example?" asks Mr. Browne anxiously. His tone suggests the idea that he is athirst for knowledge. The portly Mr. Shine, who is on her other hand, has been apparently struck dumb by her powers of conversation, mingled with immense admiration of her personal attractions. So Dicky perforce comes to the rescue. Mr. Shine has fixed his oyster eyes on her, and is listening eagerly, a little appreciative smile on his lips. He is, in fact, like Mr. Carroll's sun—"*Shining* with all his might." (The pun is Mr. Browne's; pray forgive it.)

"Oh! . . Ah! . . *Well,*" says Mrs. Berkeley, whose witty impromptu in answer to this question has not yet been evolved, "least said, soonest mended, you know, and to wake up these aborigines—*you* understand, of course"—sweetly—"that I am alluding to no one here to-night—would take a bigger mind than mine."

"*Could* there be a bigger?" says Mr. Browne, throwing a world of admiration into his treacherous eye; "still, I think I know someone who . . . and as like turns to like, you know, you had better let me introduce you to" (this in a low tone)——

"Not a woman, I *hope*," says Mrs. Berkeley, checking him.

"Not much!" Mr. Browne's face is dark with indignation. "Fancy my introducing a woman to anyone! Horrid lot, aren't they?"

"Go away! you're a bad boy!" says Mrs. Berkeley, with the affectionate smile she reserves for men alone: whereon Dicky, seeing he cannot well obey her at this moment, the dinner being only half through, and taking his dismissal at its worth, goes on valiantly, if plaintively.

"I'll go, all too soon," says he. "But in spite of your cruelty——"

"Mine? Am I ever cruel? And who is it you wish to make known to me?"

"Why," glancing across her expressively, "your next-door neighbour. The poor man has been casting murderous glances at me for the past five minutes. I'm young to die. Let me live yet a little while."

"Stupid!" says Mrs. Berkeley, shrugging her meagre shoulders. "He"—softly, so that the next-door neighbour may not hear—"was made known to me an hour ago."

"An hour ago?" questions Dicky, as if hardly believing his ears. He had, however, heard the introduction.

"Yes, of course,"

"She is a woman of genius. She knew that two great minds once met . . . It will be an everlasting grief to me, but I resign you! May he make you even *half* as happy as *I* should have done."

"Hypocrite!" says Mrs. Berkeley, with her most juvenile smile.

"Oh, it's all very well to go on like that now," says Dicky reproachfully. "Mr. Shine"—leaning a little forward and catching the Anglo-Indian's eyes—"what are your views on bimetallism, and the decrease of the rupee? Mrs. Berkeley"—"Dicky!" furiously in an undertone from Mrs. Berkeley—"is quite an authority on *both* subjects."

"My dear Mrs. Berkeley, is this so?" says Mr. Shine, waking up brilliantly. "Now look here, as I see it" . . . and so on.

"If he'll only marry her and take her away to far Hindustan, what a happy family the Hillesden folk may still be," says Mr. Browne to himself, as he turns aside to make himself agreeable to the prettiest girl at the table. Hitherto Mrs. Berkeley has frustrated his desires in this direction, so he has taken safe and quick means to get rid of her.

And, indeed, if he only knew it, he has done the lively widow a good turn. Mrs. Berkeley, for once in her life, has "struck ile"—as Mr. Gilead P. Beck would say. The Anglo-Indian, being permitted to have all the talk to himself—Mrs. Berkeley having

nothing to say on the rupee, and being hopelessly ignorant on the subject of bimetallism—gets up from dinner later on, believing himself the most eloquent, and her the most intelligent creature in the world.

## CHAPTER IX.

"The brave, 'tis true, do never shun the light;
Just are their thoughts and open are their tempers,
Freely without disguise they love or hate;
Still are they found in the fair face of the day,
And Heaven and men are judges of their actions."

CONVERSATION at the other end of the table is going briskly—perhaps a little too briskly.

Jinnie has just arrived in a very simple frock of white muslin, and a sash of innocent azure, and with, too, a brain terribly wide awake considering the hour. So far, however, beyond a distinct refusal to sit next Lady Audrey, and an even *more* distinct determination to sit in Sir Reginald's pocket, no open breach of the peace has occurred. Even when Lady Audrey addresses her as "my good child" (which really has *no* meaning), Jinnie creates no public disturbance, and nobly refrains from assault and battery, though evidently it goes hard with her.

"I *do* hope, dear Sir Reginald, you are not over-exerting yourself whilst down here," says Lady Audrey presently. She gives him one of her maiden smiles. "People like you, so hard-worked, should do

*nothing* when in the country. It is only we—useless butterflies of the world—who should do anything there; for you it should mean perfect repose."

"*Dear* little Butterfly," whispers Dicky Browne to his pretty girl, who gives him an answering glance, but cleverly refrains from a smile. Lady Audrey's eye is on her. The Butterfly disapproves of pretty girls. Sir Reginald has made it apparent, since his coming, that he admires *this* one.

"Even *I* am quite ashamed of taking up some of your time that should be given to rest alone," she simpers. "Still, I am an excellent sitter, am I not? Like a bit of marble!"

"It is quite a pleasure, I assure you," murmurs Sir Reginald.

"Oh, that is *too* kind!"—with a languishing air. "But I hear that this morning you were painting someone in the studio. *Is* that wise, when you have come down here expressly for your health?"

"He is incorrigible," says Mrs. Verschoyle, laughing; "we can't restrain him. He has begun a study that promises to be really wonderful."

"Yes?"—eagerly. "Of whom?"

Lady Audrey bends towards her. For the first time it occurs to Mrs. Verschoyle that Lady Audrey has designs on the unfortunate Sir Reginald.

"Ah!"—mischievously—"you should not ask me so *publicly*. The fact is"—lowering her voice—"it

was a little woman, charming and young—oh, yes! very young."

Lady Audrey stiffens.

"Nothing from the nude, I hope," says she in a sepulchral tone. Elderly unmarried ladies are often a little indecent. "Well, I'm afraid——"

Pause.

"Sir Reginald, Lady Audrey is anxious to know if your study of this morning was—draped."

"I'm afraid not," says the genial painter. He has caught the twinkle in Mrs. Verschoyle's eye.

"I had no idea," says Lady Audrey, almost closing her spinster lids, "that Anthony would permit such—such extraordinary proceedings (to say the *least* of them) in his house."

"But she was so charming," says Sir Reginald. "Every limb so rounded—every smile so sweet. It was a delight to paint her, and——"

"No more, *please!*" says Lady Audrey, with an indignant sniff.

"And she was only two years old," continues Sir Reginald, finishing his sentence ruthlessly. "Such a dear little naked child. By-the-by"—suavely—"can you give me a sitting at twelve to-morrow? A little early, but——"

"A most reasonable hour," says Lady Audrey.

Her tone is still a little starchy—the word "naked" has offended her—but everyone feels the

episode is at an end. Everyone, however, is wrong.

"Are you goin' to paint *her?*" asks Jinnie in a tone she firmly believes to be a whisper, but which reverberates through the room. As though her voice is not enough, she makes vigorous use of the valuable first finger, directing it at Lady Audrey.

"I hope so," says Sir Reginald smoothly. "But people as a rule, you know, Jinnie, do not point, or make personal observations out loud. And, besides——"

He has done his best, poor man; but it would take a Napoleon to frown down Jinnie.

"What! Her, and not *me?* That ol——"

A severe pinch from Mr. Browne, who has got up under pretence of getting some grapes, delivered at the critical moment, puts an end luckily to the unfinished word.

Providentially, too, Lady Audrey has been carried away by Mrs. Verschoyle into a dissertation on the requirements of the poor, and thus a terrible catastrophe has been averted.

Sir Reginald, however, is greatly annoyed; and Jinnie, after another fresh sally, finding him for the first time cold to her witticisms, turns her dark, curious eyes full upon him. There is a little fear in these usually defiant orbs.

"What have I done?" demands she, in a wonder-

fully subdued tone for the dauntless Jinnie. There is even a suspicion of tears in it. She is devoted to Baring, and this queer coldness of his, that she does not at all understand, reduces her to the last extremity.

"You have been rude," says Baring in a low tone.

"Well, I don't care"—rebelliously. "You've been cross to me. You are looking *horrid* at me. And you are unkind, too"—as if all the foregoing were nothing to this. "You are the unkindest pig I ever met. You are painting that nasty little baby of Mrs. Jones's, without a bit of clothes on her—not so much"—here Jinnie grows choked with sobs that threaten to be loud and deep—"not so much as her shimmy! And you've never painted *me* like that." Sensation at table. "Though I don't *care!*" —passionately. "I'd *hate* to be painted like that. I want my pinky frock on me, an' my sash. I——" Miss Verschoyle rises, and, standing well back, regards Sir Reginald with a crushing air. "I'll *never* love you again! You're a beast, you are! You're painting that nasty wobbly baby, an' now *her*."

Again the terrible forefinger defines the situation.

"Yes, my dear," says Lady Audrey, addressing the irate Jinnie with what she honestly believes to be a fascinating, but what in reality is a most forbidding smile. "Sir Reginald has most kindly consented"—Jinnie begins to think of the local concerts—

"to make my poor face a masterpiece. You surely don't object to that, little girl!"

"Was he painting you this morning?" asks Jinnie, her queer eyes searching Lady Audrey's.

"Certainly. We must say 'yes' to that, Sir Reginald, eh? This very morning"—archly.

"In the studio?"

Lady Audrey nods.

"In the studio, I think, Sir Reginald?"—with an engaging smile.

"The same place where he painted Mrs. Jones's baby?"

"The very same"—with quite a touch of hilarity.

*"Had you your clothes on?"*

Frightful silence!

Lady Audrey has sunk back upon her chair with evidently a threatening of hysterics. Mrs. Berkeley is choking behind her fan, and Mr. Browne, who ought to have known better, is, I regret to say, apparently in the last stage of apoplexy. Fans up to this have not been permitted to men, and thus handicapped, Mr. Browne has perforce to decline behind his napkin.

Lady Maria, with a glance at Mrs. Berkeley, rises promptly. It is a *little* too soon, but the situation must be saved—and *such* a situation!

The women all rustle away to the drawing-room, and Jinnie, thank Heaven! goes to bed.

* * * * *

"You will come over to-morrow and take luncheon with me?" says Lady Maria to Cecil, just at her departure.

"Thank you, yes," returns Cecil brightly.

Involuntarily her glance goes towards the corner of the hall where Anthony and Fenton are standing. Anthony interrupts her glance.

"Won't you ask us, too, mother?"

"My dear, of *course*. You and Sidney and Dicky." She laughs her pleasant old laugh. "The more the merrier. Men are scarce always in these small places, and always welcome."

"Shall I be welcome?"

Fenton has crossed the hall to Cecil's side. He throws a great deal of meaning into his question.

"You?" says she, smiling; and then, trying to control the little touch of feeling that is agitating her: "Yes. Do come!"

## CHAPTER X.

"After all, the most natural beauty in the world is honesty and moral truth, for all beauty is truth."

OUT here on the terrace, so balmy is the air that one can scarcely believe summer has not arrived once more in mad haste. But "February, fair maid," only is with us—a maid still young, as maids should be, and very frivolous! The air is almost warm, and from the parterres beneath the breath of the coming flowers is ascending delicately, nervously. Not the breath of such unfriendly blossoms as "The snow-drop cold, that trembles not to kisses of the bee!" but violets and sweet alyssum, and a few early anemones, dainty if gaudy; whilst all round and everywhere are the splendid daffodils, those fair and haughty damsels "that take the winds of March with beauty."

Cecil, leaning over the iron railings of the terrace, and noting the beauty of the glorious day—the thrill in all things growing—is conscious of a strange sense of delight—of joy. She feels uplifted and happy—too happy for mental analysis of her mood. It would have troubled her to ask her whether the

charm of the day, or only of the minute, has thus exhilarated her; making her feel that wings are superfluous things to certain mortals, and that she at any moment, without accessories of any kind, could soar 'twixt earth and heaven—with heaven in reach, if she so wills it.

She glances towards her heaven.

"You thought I would not come back," says Fenton in answer to that glance, and *à propos* of something just said by her. "Did you really believe I could keep away?"

His tone is low and very soft—and distinctly reproachful. To be reproached by her lover always touches a woman: and Cecil specially would be open to sentiment of this kind, her nature being generous in the extreme. All through luncheon, Fenton, who had returned to Hillesden for this special purpose, had paid assiduous, if very careful, courtship to her; so careful, indeed, that Anthony alone of all men there had noticed it; and with the knowledge, as it came to him, came not grief only, but despair.

"I don't know that I thought at all," says she, slow but uncontrollable tears gathering in her eyes.

"Does that mean, Cecil, that you don't care?"

"I don't think you ought to say that."

She has recovered herself again, and, glancing at her, he, whose judgment has never been at fault before, is uncertain now as to whether she loves him

sufficiently to throw in her comfortable lot with his impecunious one; a doubt, but a slight one.

"Perhaps not."

He leans over the railings and looks towards where the last gleams of the sun are now clinging to the hills, as though beseeching them to keep dread night away.

"There are many things I say that no one cares for," murmurs he sadly. He does the sadness perfectly. "But you! I *did* believe in you."

"You may"—softly—"believe still."

She draws her breath quickly as she says this, and now that it *is* said, she makes a movement as if to go, but her hand is lying on the railings, and Fenton, with a quick gesture, lays his own upon it. Thus capturing it, he waits—holding it closely—and expecting every moment an indignant removal of the slender fingers within his, but, after a first gentle repulse, the fingers lie calmly in his own.

So, then, the victory is his. Now to propose, and then . . . Yes, he will speak. Her hand is still in his. Yet . . . Something holds him back, checks him. To the day of his death he never knows what it is, but that he *does* hold back is true. He hesitates, and that instant's hesitation changes the current of more lives than one.

He is still holding her hand, but now she softly removes it—not sharply, not distrustfully, but with a

gentle determination. As she does it she smiles at him. There is a great friendliness in her glance, with a certain shyness that makes her beautiful face even more beautiful; but this the man beside her fails to see.

The withdrawal of her hand, however, warms him to his work. He must secure her now or never —now, before she hears anything. *That other* is uncertain! From day to day troubles may be expected from her. But with Cecil once secured—why, Cecil's money may keep "that other" silent.

He turns to Cecil, the very words of his proposal on his lips, when she stays him. There is a pretty light in her lovely eyes, and a sweet pity on her lips.

"Sidney." That clasp of his hand on hers has made him one with her, she believes in him so truly. "Sidney, do you remember last summer?" She is feeling very confidential with him now, and very happy. Oh! he would never have taken her hand like that and held it if he didn't love her! "How beautiful it was, and yet——" Her face grows a little sad. Then, "I often think of it—of *her*." The last two words are breathed so low, he does not hear them.

"And I too," returns Fenton tenderly, thinking she is alluding to his visit at that time to The Towers.

"I am sure of it. You always seemed to me," glancing at him straightly, "so good at heart. That," a little shyly again, "is why I have made such a friend of you. Do you know I, too, Sidney, never cease to think of . . . that poor little girl."

Fenton turns aside, and, looking over the railings, throws a pebble into the midst of a blooming bunch of "butter and eggs."

"I wonder what became of her?" continues Cecil, laying her own arms upon the railing.

"I wonder!" says he.

He had been on the point of proposing to her, as has been said. Any thought that way lies dead and buried now—for the present.

"You have heard nothing?" says Cecil sadly. "She liked you, I think—at least, I often fancied she did."

"She has not written to you, then, or told you anything?" He laughs as he asks this—a laugh very imperfect. "She has told me nothing."

"What a sad, silent little creature! I often hope, Sidney, I may meet her somewhere and help her."

"A delusive hope."

His face is still turned away, but his voice is as natural as ever.

"Oh no; one life drops into another very often. I am quite sure I shall see Miss Royce again. Not here, of course, but——"

"'In that station of life into which it has pleased —the *devil*—to call her,'" quotes Fenton, looking at Cecil with eyes as clear as day, and a light laugh. Who the devil was that had pleased to call Miss Royce into her present state of life, he refrains from saying.

"Cecil, come in and have some tea," says Mrs. Verschoyle, coming suddenly to the window. And Cecil, with a little sigh, turns and goes indoors, Fenton at her elbow.

They are not the only fresh entries. Cecil has barely had time to take her cup in her hands when Jinnie rushes tumultuously into the room.

"Jinnie, darling, what dreadful manners!" says Jinnie's mother. She has said it so often that one wonders why she is not ashamed of saying it again. She opens her arms, however, and the child springs into them.

"I've seen Miss Royce!" cries she.

---

## CHAPTER XI.

"And thou wert aye a masker bold:
What strange disguise hast now put on?"

"MISS ROYCE!" says Lady Maria, holding out her pretty hands apprehensively. "Impossible, darling!"

"Yes, I did," a little indignantly; "down by the river."

"Miss Royce!" says Verschoyle. He turns to his sister-in-law. "*Could* she have come back?"

Fenton, who had been standing very close to one of the windows, now turns leisurely and gazes out of it, his back to the room.

"No, no; impossible—as your mother says."

"It is *not,*" says Jinnie hotly. "I saw her quite plain! She had a new frock on her, and her face was white. An' I called to her. I screamed out my *biggest*" (this is saying a good deal, as all her listeners allow), "but she didn't hear me. She ran away, back by the bank and into the wood."

"And you?" asks her mother.

"I wanted to run after her, but Miss Sterling wouldn't let me. I *hate* Miss Sterling—she's a pig!"

"Jinnie, my *dear!*"

"Well"—cheerfully—"she *is*, anyway. I wish she would go away. An' I wish Miss Royce was coming back again. Maybe"—hopefully—"she is."

"Go and take off your things, darling," says her mother, who at heart is a little disturbed. Why on earth should that wayward girl have come back here again? Is she in want? Oh, surely not. Poor girl! Had they been too harsh to her?

"I will in a minute," says Jinnie, "but I haven't said 'how-d'ye-do' yet."

Anything to make a delay. Jinnie, who as a rule has to be bribed to be polite, now goes round the room, making the most courteous greetings to everyone, except to Fenton. Coming to him she pauses, and having made a careful survey of his features, puts both her thin little hands behind her back.

"Why do you look so cross?" asks she.

"*Cross!*" Fenton recovers himself instantly. "And to *you*, Jinnie? Colney Hatch will get you yet if you don't be more careful."

"Well, you *were*," says Jinnie, a little puzzled by his change of countenance. "What were you thinking of?"

"Of the dreadful fact that I must leave *you* tomorrow."

He laughs, and catching her by her tiny elbows, lifts her high into the air. It is quite true that he

is going. Verschoyle and all of them are aware of it. He has some leave still remaining to him, but he has arranged to spend it elsewhere. He has been, however, a little vague about his movements. Anthony was aware that he was in difficulties of some sort—money difficulties principally, and there was a suggestion of his sending in his papers. Verschoyle had offered to help him, but Fenton had laughed it off. Sufficient unto the day was the evil thereof; and he might be able to hang on still for a bit—and if not——

He was always vague.

"You'll come soon again?" says Jinnie, who is very fond of him. Cecil, who is near her, draws her on her knee.

"Almost immediately!" returns he gaily.

He gives a swift glance at Miss Fairfax as he says this. She is indeed his last card, and, in spite of his present difficulties, when he came here he determined to play it—with small hope of success, however, until this evening, and even now he is not *quite* sure. Nevertheless, with ruin hanging over him, he is still light-hearted and débonnaire.

"By-the-by, Anthony, I think I ought to say good-bye to the Langley-Binkses and a few others this afternoon. They've been very civil to me. It would be only decent, eh?"

"I am sure they would appreciate it," says An-

thony with a smile. "If you go through the upper meadow you will reach the Langley-Binkses' place in half the time."

There is extreme cordiality in his air. It is impossible to restrain the longing to get Fenton away from Cecil as quickly as possible.

"Your charm increases with your years," says Mrs. Verschoyle as he bids her good-bye. She smiles, but her tone is very cold. That old strange distrust of him is alive again. Why is he in such hot haste to go? And to say good-bye to the Langley-Binkses, of all people, who as a rule have been nothing to him, save butts for his idle sarcasms. And he, of all people, to put himself out to please—to propitiate a living soul! "Such courtesy as yours is delightful nowadays," says she.

"You say too much," returns he, pressing her hand affectionately—he is quite equal to most occasions—"but if I have *your* appreciation——"

He says good-bye to Lady Maria and to the others, and finally to Cecil.

Miss Fairfax is standing now a little drawn back from the rest, and partially hidden by a curtain; but "lovers' eyes are sharp to see," and Verschoyle, with a sense of maddening misery, is certain of the fact that Cecil's hand lies clasped in Fenton's for quite half a minute—that a light has grown within her eyes that never shone for him—and that, as

finally Fenton leaves her, the girl's eyes follow him to the door.

Sweet and honest eyes, it is well they can follow him no farther!

* * * * *

Fenton's feet do not go towards the old meadow that will lead so quickly to the home of the Langley-Binkses; on the contrary, they go quite in the contrary direction.

He, indeed, "gathers up his loins," as the Scriptures say, and runs swiftly, by hidden ways, to that old trysting-place of his and Maden's—the ash-grove.

Knowledge of the other sex has brought him to this spot. Women—those sentimental fools—are sure, like murderers, to come back to the scene of their . . . folly.

But he does not find Maden here. For all that—after glancing round to assure himself, not that she, but that no troublesome third is present—he goes to a little chestnut-tree now half bursting into leaf, and, stooping, lifts a plain white stone beneath it.

It had often before been a silent post-office for Maden and for him. Now again it fulfils its duty. A little note lies beneath it:

"I am here. I have followed you. I know your intention. But as long as life is in me, it shall never

be fulfilled. I must, I *will* see you. Meet me to-night at Ingham."

Fenton's frown is a little ugly as he reads this. What a nuisance it all is! But, by Jove, what a spirit she has! Through his depression and rage a sort of sullen admiration for her stirs him.

It does not stay him from his determination, however. This thing *must* be put a stop to, now, at once, and for ever! If she insists on seeing him to-night at Ingham—so be it. It would no doubt be dangerous *not* to see her. But when he does, he will declare to her fully his intention of marrying Cecil Fairfax—if fate so far helps as to make that desirable heiress accept him.

Of course she will *not!* It would be just his luck all over, to be refused by her; and, indeed, so uncertain is his belief in Cecil's love for him—an uncertainty heightened by the fact that he has no smallest affection for her, and is not in touch with her on any point, and does not in the least understand her—that he decides on writing to her from The Towers before his departure, and proposing to her, giving—very recklessly—his address at Ingham. If she accepts him, he will be able to explain away any unpleasant gossip later on, should it arise, about Maden's having been there, too, at that particular time—Maden he had always felt could be nasty—

but, and he laughs again involuntarily, Cecil will refuse him. Well, he shall so word his letter that, if it is to be a refusal, she need not write; if an acceptance . . . what the deuce of a bore life is likely to be!

In the meantime . . . Maden.

Well, he must buy her off. His thoughts grow puzzled here. Has he the money, in his now somewhat impecunious condition, to buy anyone off? And, more, had he the world's wealth, could he buy *her* off? She—he pales a little . . . remembering . . . Is she one to count and balance money against love? He feels himself all at once between the devil and the deep sea. *How* on earth is he to get out of this embroglio?

Any way, he will clench the matter to-night. To-night! no later. He will write his letter of proposal to Cecil, the answer to be sent to Ingham, and there, with Maden present, will fight the battle out to the bitter end. The last penny he has shall be Maden's if she consents to part without a row; and even after the parting——

He stops here. *After* the parting will come his marriage with Cecil, and any money he *then* will have . . . no, it does not bear looking into.

Troubled as he is, he still remembers to pay that visit to the Langley-Binkses, who are immensely de-

lighted with it, and afterwards goes back to The Towers, with barely two hours left to pack his clothes, to make necessary explanations to Anthony, and catch the six train to Ingham.

## CHAPTER XII.

"And now the heaven is dark, and bright, and loud
With wind, and starry drift and moon and cloud,
And night's cry rings in straining sheet and shroud:
What help is ours if hope like yours be none?"

"AFTER all, Anthony, I find I must leave here this evening. Horrid grind, but can't be helped. A telegram from a lawyer-fellow of mine."

This is a distinct lie, but even the best of us lie sometimes—distinctly!

"My dear fellow, I'm so sorry." Anthony tries to throw a touch of real regret into his tone, and on the whole gets through his first bit of hypocrisy very successfully. "Where are you going? Town?"

"No, Ingham. He has got a case there, and thought it better, as I was so near, to see me without delay. I shall stay there till to-morrow morning—then run up to town. After that"—he laughs suddenly—"probably the Deluge."

"Money difficulties?" says Anthony with sympathy. Now that his cousin is going away from—*her,* he feels not only cordial towards him, but positively grateful. "If I can do anything, Sid——"

"No, no. I don't mind confessing"—gaily—"that I'm stone broke; but I've an arrow in my quiver still, and, if it hits home, I swear I'll settle down to all the domestic virtues at once!"

Anthony pauses in the act of lighting a cigar, and glances at him sharply.

"Settle down"—a sudden pang of fear shoots through his heart—"to all the domestic virtues!"

"You mean——" questions he.

"Well, look here, I'll tell you. Don't call me a conceited ass; but I—have some reason to believe that Cecil—oh, hang it! it's very hard to put it, but—well, I think she likes me above most, you know."

"You say you have reason——"

Anthony's tone is strained and harsh.

"Some—not much, I confess. Why I should have any seems extraordinary; and yet I honestly think that in asking her to marry me, I"—laughing—"run the risk of her saying 'Yes.'"

"The risk?"

Verschoyle has turned to the fire, afraid, perhaps, of the other's seeing his face.

"Well, yes; to confess the hateful truth, Tony, I don't admire her. Why she should like me——"

"Oh, this room is intolerable!" breaks in Verschoyle violently. "What the devil do they mean by making a fire like this?"

He strides to the window nearest him, the one opening on to the veranda, and flings it wide.

"'Tis warm, isn't it?" says Fenton genially. To do him justice, he has not the remotest idea of Verschoyle's love for Cecil. "What I was going to say was, that I can't imagine Cecil's caring for a fellow like me. Now, *you* would be more the sort of——"

Verschoyle interrupts him.

"Go on," says he. "Never mind me; I don't come into this at all."

"That's just what surprises me," says Fenton amiably. "She is quite the sort of woman that I am sure you will marry some day; but for my taste she is too statuesque—too cold. I dare say I could get on well enough with her, however, if——" Here Verschoyle makes a sudden movement—a dangerous one; but Fenton, going on happily, quite unconscious of the other's emotion, stays the torrent that was impending. "The question is, would she get on with me? I hardly come under the class of the domestic creature. 'If you want to know me, come live with me,' says some old and, I can't help thinking, very immoral proverb. It would be a wild mistake with *me* as its hero. 'If you want to live with me, don't try to know me,' would be nearer the mark. That proverb should be reversed."

"For you; not for her," says Anthony in a stifled

tone. "To know *her* would be indeed a liberal education."

"I'm not high-flown, Tony, as you know. I don't aspire to the clearer airs; I find them, as a rule, chilling. But if she will condescend to accept me, she will suit me in some ways—off-ways, you know—admirably. She has money, for one thing—that covers a multitude of virtues—and she is certainly bred-looking, and——"

"You actually mean to propose to her, then?"

"My dear chap, have you been deaf all this time? Certainly I mean it; it's my last chance, and if she—well——" breaking off. "It's deuced rude, you know; and I honour her—I *do*—above most women, and that's what makes me feel rather sneaky about it. For one thing, I always swore to myself I'd never marry for money; and now! . . . I was on the very point of asking her this afternoon—you remember"—confidentially—"she went out on the terrace with me after lunch?"

"Yes. Well"—Anthony's face is as white as death, but, standing near the open window, out of the glare of the lamps, it can't be seen—"why didn't you?"

"On my honour, I hardly know. I expect I shied, as it were, at the last moment—a final shrinking from giving up my freedom."

"Was that it? . . . You felt *quite* sure, then?"

Verschoyle stops as if choked.

"At that moment?—yes, quite," says Fenton cheerfully. "To tell you the truth, I don't feel anything like so sure *now*. I dare say I've made one of my many mistakes. A girl like her—of the 'icily regular, splendidly null' sort—could hardly fancy a person of my calibre. In fact"—modestly—"I begin to think she's too good for the likes of me; but, still, I'll risk it. I have ten minutes still, and if you will give me a pen and paper, I'll write to her."

*"Now?"*

"The better the moment, the better the deed, and I feel very virtuous and domestic at this one. It must be your influence, Tony."

He laughs, flings the end of his cigar into the fire, and rises and moves towards the writing-table.

Verschoyle moves, too.

"There is no post to-night," says he hoarsely.

"I know that; but what do I want of a post when you are here? *You* will send the letter to her to-night in time for me to get a reply to it to-morrow morning at Ingham. I shall be there till the ten train; that will take me on to town, to my old quarters."

He takes up a pen, hesitates, then looks back at Anthony with his most inconsequent air.

"Look here—what shall I say to her?"

"My God, man! are you *mad*—to begin a new life for *her,* and you, like this?"

Verschoyle lays his hand upon his arm—almost drags him back from the table.

"Always serious, Tony," says Fenton, amused. "Sometimes I envy you. But I don't think you need be unhappy about this new life of mine. I expect this beginning of it"—shrugging his shoulders, and pointing to the still unwritten proposal—"will also be the end of it. Now give one a moment, like a good fellow."

"But think."

"I'm thinking as hard as I can. Now"—laughing—"how would *you* begin? Oh, I say"—quickly, but laughing still—"when she gets my letter, Anthony, *she'll* be thinking, if you hold on to me like that, that I've got the jigs. You'll spoil my last chance."

He makes a swift gesture, and Anthony, answering it, draws back. After all, what right has he to interfere—to try and save her? None!

"I've told her," says Fenton presently, looking up from the letter he is now deliberately folding, "that—but, look here, I'll read it to you."

"No, no!" says Verschoyle indignantly.

"Why not? It isn't a love effusion. 'My dear Cecil——'"

He rattles it off in spite of Verschoyle's angry

disgust, who, indeed, never heard one word that was in it,

*Someone else does, however!*

"You see," says Fenton, "I have told her I shall be at Ingham until ten to-morrow. She is to answer it there if she means 'Yes'; to send *no* answer if she means 'No.' Nothing can be simpler, and I really don't care which it is. *She* wouldn't suit me, but her money would."

"Have you ever thought," says Verschoyle, now white with rage, "what a damnable thing this is that you are doing?"

"Well, I have," says Fenton agreeably. "I'm a barefaced beggar, I allow; but, after all, I'm an honest one. I *say* what lots of other fellows mean, but *don't* say. Well, here's the letter. I leave it to you, old fellow, to have it sent. If she gets it in an hour from this, she can answer it by the next post. I've told her all about it: that if she *will*—*you* know —I'll hear from her to-morrow; and if I don't—which I fully expect—I'll know she will have nothing to do with me, which will prove her of sounder mind than I believe her now."

The letter is in Anthony's hands. His fingers have tightened over it. There is a strange gray look on his face.

"If you don't hear to-morrow, then, you will understand that she has refused you?"

"What an old raven!" says Sidney, laughing. "Yes; you have it in a nutshell."

"You mean to marry her, then?"

"If she will have me."

"But——"

Anthony breaks off sharply, and both men turn towards the open window. What is that strange sound that has come through it? A cry? A groan?

It is gone almost as they turn to listen.

"An owl, perhaps," says Fenton carelessly. "Well, my time is nearly up. I leave that letter to you, Tony, and I know you will send it on. I give it into safe hands."

"I shall send it," says Anthony, his tone dull, as of one thinking of something else.

To buy him off—that is the thought. These two men, so different, have had the same desire within the last few hours. To buy off—somebody!

"Why do this thing?" says he. "You don't care for her—and——" He hesitates again. It is a delicate subject, and if he should guess wrong! "If you want money?" he blurts out suddenly.

"My dear fellow, what a superfluous question! Was there ever an hour in my life when I didn't want money?"

"I can help you."

"'Pon my soul, Tony, I think you're about the best friend a man ever had," says Sidney, with such

honest gratitude in his eyes as makes Verschoyle feel a double-dyed hypocrite. "But, you see, it's like this: I'm drained dry, and even a loan from you, however handsome——"

"It need not be a loan," says Anthony in a stifled tone. To half his kingdom he would enlarge his offer, reserving the other half only for Cecil.

"Oh, come, I say! don't do the good Samaritan too far; and, besides, even a gift wouldn't do me. I'm dipped to my neck, and only a rich wife can pull me through."

"Have you once thought of—*her?*"

"I have indeed"—frankly; "and not only once, but very often. I was bound to do that. Whether I've got to think of her in the future depends on you and that letter you hold"—pointing lightly to the letter still held tightly in Verschoyle's hand. "If Cecil will have me, well and good. If she will not have me, well and good, too. As you may see, I approach this subject with an unbiassed mind. To confess the whole truth to you, it is a matter of convenience"—he laughs aloud, and very heartily, here, as if tickled at his own idea—"to save myself from bankruptcy. But I know, at the back of my heart, that if she does not answer that letter you hold, I shall be—well, not to be impolite, excellently contented. I hear the wheels coming round to the door, don't I? Well"—holding out his hand, in which

Anthony mechanically lays his—"till better times; and don't forget that letter, Tony—send it at once. My fate depends on the answer. But I know it is safe with *you.*"

He laughs, squeezes Anthony's hand affectionately, and rushes out of the room.

## CHAPTER XIII.

"In the wood where I wandered astray,
Came the Devil a-talking to me,
O mother! mother!
But why did ye tell me, and why did they say,
That the Devil's a horrible blackamoor? He
Black-faced and horrible? No, mother, no."

ANTHONY, thus left with the fatal letter in his hand, stands motionless, his eyes bent on the carpet. The letter, tightly crumpled in his grasp, takes little of his attention, his mind being bent on solving many thoughts. So intent is he, indeed, on these perplexing, nay, miserable problems, that it is only when a small, hard hand descends upon the paper he is holding—evidently with the intention of appropriating it — that he comes back to the present moment, and the fact that there is someone in the room beside himself. He turns sharply. For a moment he stares, as if not believing. Then—.

"Miss Royce! You!"

He would have said more, perhaps—redeemed himself from the suspicion of discourtesy so foreign to him—but for the moment he feels benumbed. She—why should *she* be here? That child Jinnie,

then, was right. She *had* seen her. But that she should come here, and just after his interview with Sidney, the suppressed agony of which is hardly to be calculated! And this girl! *Why* is she here—and *now?*

"Yes; that is still my name," says Maden, so calmly, in such a still way, that the bitter irony of her remark goes by him; and, out of his natural grace, he blames himself for his evil imaginings. Recovering himself almost immediately, he says courteously:

"I am glad you have come back to us again. But"—gently—"I think you should have explained a little, or written."

"Explained!"

Miss Royce frowns. Does he *mean* it? Is it possible he doesn't *know?*

"Well, yes. My mother was a good deal put out about your—that is, your sudden disappearance." Verschoyle says this in his most ordinary way, whilst still fighting with his doubts that *will* not be suppressed. "And so was Mrs. Verschoyle; and as for Jinnie! . . . But you have seen them all, perhaps?" It is his last, most *impotent* hope.

Miss Royce's lip curls. Mrs. Verschoyle!

"Oh no!" Her tone is contemptuous. It assists Verschoyle's troubled thoughts, and fixes them upon the small, defiant figure before him. She is ex-

quisitely dressed, if very simply, and the face he had always admired (as Cecil, too, had admired it) is looking exquisite, too—only a little drawn, perhaps, a little older. "I have not come back here to see Jinnie, or even"—with a slight touch of insolence—"Mrs. Verschoyle."

"Then?"

Verschoyle's question is imperative. Miss Royce answers it in kind.

"I came here," says she, her small, white face defiant and mutinous, "to see . . . Sidney Fenton."

For a few seconds Verschoyle's heart seems to cease beating.

To see Sidney Fenton! His hand closes convulsively upon the letter. This girl, then, has come here to see Sidney—a girl believed to be lost to them for ever; gone away in a fit of anger—anger in no way connected with Fenton. Was she, indeed, *ever* connected with Fenton in the minds here—in *any* of their minds? A few words culled at random, and thought nothing of when said, now come back to him, as things will in strange times. Surely Dicky Browne and Carry had given little hints now and then. . . .

"Captain Fenton?" says he very quietly. "He was here only this moment."

"I know that." A queer smile disfigures her

mouth for a second, "And now he has gone. But he has left that letter behind him."

"You know that?" says Verschoyle, surprised.

"So much"—coldly—"and a great deal more. I know what that letter contains, for example. You"—her face whitening—"will give it to me?"

"I'm afraid I can't do that," says Anthony.

"Even though you know its contents?"

"Even then."

Miss Royce flings up her arms passionately.

"Oh, *fool!*" says she. "Do you know what *that* means? Destruction to you and her! When I see him——"

"Probably that will not be for some time."

"*It will be to-night, and at Ingham.*"

"Ingham!" Verschoyle is conscious of a desire to kill someone. My God! what a liar that devil is! "I don't believe it," says he violently. For the first time in all his kindly life he insults a woman. "He has gone there to meet his solicitor."

"I think not," says Miss Royce dryly. "For solicitor, read—*me.*"

There is a little pause—a pause that is terrible.

"He was to meet you at Ingham when he left here?"

"Beyond doubt." She turns up her small head and her shoulders with a wonderful gesture. "And beyond doubt we shall meet shortly. I shall arrive

there nearly as soon as he will, by catching the express." Here she glances leisurely at the clock ticking on the marble mantel-shelf behind her. "He was at the Dower-house to-day, was he not? I had seen Jinnie, as of course you know, and that decided me. *She* never conceals anything, so I felt sure she would tell of my being in the neighbourhood—otherwise I should not have let the child see me. I had other cards, of course, but I felt the talkative Jinnie would play the present ones perfectly. I left a little note for Sidney Fenton beneath a stone that was an old friend of ours for many days — a stone — down in the ——" Here she struggles with her audacity; it seems to forsake her. "Down in the ash-grove." She barely brings out the word. Memory is too strong for her. She stops, as if suffocating, for a moment—a moment only, however—and then goes on. "He found it."

"How do you know?" asks Anthony; and then quickly, "You met him?"

His fingers tighten on the letter he holds.

"No; I only watched him. It was my business to see he got that letter, and"—with a fugitive smile—"I never neglect any business that concerns myself. He has gone to Ingham, and there he will wait for me. He thinks"—with a nonchalant shrug —"he is going to make me a scene; but when he sees me, all that will be at an end. I shall know

how to manage him. When *with* him"—with a touch of passionate pride—"I can always influence him. It is when he is away from me I fail. And he is so uncertain." It is terrible, the extraordinary calmness, the deliberation, with which she discusses Fenton and her own miserable situation. "That is why"—pausing again, and letting her eyes rest meaningly on Verschoyle's—"it would be so unpleasant for his *wife,* should he marry. Once he saw me, she——" A little gesture finishes the sentence. For the first time Anthony notices the *strength* in the small face, still so pale and childish. "I really think I should give up that letter, if I were you," says she.

"Miss Royce," says Verschoyle, his face like a stone, "I have refrained up to this from asking you any direct personal question. Now, in Miss Fairfax's interests——" He hesitates, as if stung by the mention of her name in this wretched discussion, then goes on: "As you seem to know the contents of this letter"—glancing at it—"and of my cousin's intention to propose to Miss Fairfax, I must ask you one question. What are you to Captain Fenton?"

"Does it require an answer?" Her low, soft, *trainante* voice is clear and distinct. A little hostile smile curls her lips. "*Will* you have your 'pound of flesh?' Well!" She draws a short, sharp breath

that must have hurt her, though still she smiles. "I am——"

"Miss Royce, stop!" cries Anthony almost violently. All at once he feels like a coward. "*Say nothing.*" What a little creature she is, and how young! Dear God, is it just that some men should live, and go their ways unpunished? "It's unfair; it's beastly unfair!" cries he contritely. "I—I beg your pardon."

"You have asked me a question, and I shall answer it," says she, with cold determination. "You shall know what you"—again her eyes seek his—"*want* to know. I——"

"*Don't!*" says Verschoyle. "Miss Royce, take care! Say nothing that you will wish unsaid to-morrow."

"I shall not wish it unsaid. And"—with sudden wild passion—"I wish *nothing* undone. Nothing! nothing!" She stands a little further away from him, clutching the back of a chair. "You think I know what *shame* means. That I am afraid. That I shrink from saying it. No! no!" She laughs suddenly through her hurried breathing—a laugh that Verschoyle hopes in his soul he will never hear again. "You mistake me there. I am bad—bad all *through*, I tell you! And now for your answer. I am——"

If she grows suddenly white, to the point of

fainting, her eyes gleam with a fresh and splendid fire.

"Miss Royce!"—imploringly.

"I am Sidney Fenton's mistress!"

In slow, distinct syllables she says the dreadful words!

---

## CHAPTER XIV.

"Have ye not seen sometime a palë face
(Among a press) of him that hath been lad
Toward his death, where he getteth no grace,
And such a colour in his face hath had
Men mightë know him that was so bestad
Amongës all the faces in that rout?"

Of course he had known it: yet the verification, the actual saying of it, sends a rush of rage through Verschoyle's heart. Not rage against her—this small, violent, untamed thing, but against Fenton, that damnable cur. And she—that *she,* Cecil, his heart's delight, should lavish one thought on him! For a mere fraction of time, a repulsion towards her, a distinct contempt, adds to the fury of his pain—then dies away. . . . So spotless as she is, how could she dream of treachery—of guilt like this?

*Treachery!* He leans heavily against the table and tries to collect himself. Why, only ten minutes ago that devil had sat here at this table and written a letter asking Cecil to give herself, her life, into his keeping. This very letter that now he holds! No doubt the pages are covered with vows of love and of devotion, and whilst scribbling them from a

brain well trained in such effusions, he had talked to him of marrying, of growing domesticated, whilst all the time he had been making arrangements to meet Miss Royce—that pale, slight thing over there—within an hour, at Ingham.

The passion, the disgust, in him is so high that he turns upon Maden, who is standing motionless, her hand still upon the back of the chair, looking straight at him.

"What proof is there of this story?" demands he sternly. "Is there any truth in it? Will you swear to it?"

"I will swear to it," says she; "but do you think it requires swearing to?"

"He must be the devil incarnate," says Verschoyle, still unable to control himself. "To lie thus to *her*—to lie to an angel!"

"It is the business of devils to lie to angels," says Miss Royce. "He has not yet, however"—pointing to the letter—"lied to your—Miss Fairfax. It is *you* who will lie, if you let her have—that. But"—slowly, deliberately—"I would not have you think your cousin a confirmed liar. To *me* he never lied!"

"To you——"

There is such anger in his face, such a desire to say things best left unsaid, that she stays him by

a gesture almost regal, and therefore wonderful in one so small and slight.

"Never!" repeats she coldly. "I quite understood what I was doing. He never lied to me; I shall not lie towards him. He told me from the first he was too poor to marry me. I went with him, knowing quite well the probable fate that lay before me."

She had not once raised her voice, she looks quite calm—a little scornful always, perhaps—but it is impossible not to admire the truth, the generosity of her statement, that is meant to let the man who has betrayed her go scot-free of blame—towards *her,* at all events; yet in this same moment she is betraying him, most wilfully and of set purpose!

"I swear all this to you," says she, "and now I ask you to swear one thing to me—a small matter, no doubt, to all the world, but all the world to me. Swear"—her eyes resting on his, grown brilliant with pain—"swear to me you will tell no one what I have told you to-night. You, and you only, know the truth of my going from the Dower-house; swear that you will keep that knowledge sacred."

She has not come an inch closer to him, but her dark sombre eyes are fixed on his.

"I swear it," says Verschoyle gently. In truth he is now—his first great rage over—very sorry for her, poor soul! She should have been happy, but

now . . . In her first and loveliest time of life . . . And that dastard! "I swear it," repeats he, little knowing what that oath will cost him in the very near future; though, *had* he known, he would probably have taken it, all the same. How could any man, for *any* consideration, give up this poor girl's confidence to the world?

"I knew you would; I knew I was safe with you," says Maden, in a tone so sad, so fraught with agony of mind, that his oath seems doubly bound. She has shrunk away from him, and is now standing, almost huddled up, against the bookcase in the corner. A sudden strained silence—a horror of life—has overcome her beneath the kindly presence of this gentleman.

He had shown no disdain of her from the first. No open, insulting suspicions, no disgust, only a most gentle pity. And now—now when he knows all—his air has undergone no change. It is still quite courteous. His eyes rest on hers as kindly as they did before . . . before she had told him of her shame. Of course he must have known, but his chivalry in pretending *not* to know——

Her defiant attitude breaks down.

"Thank you," says she. "One good turn deserves another, doesn't it? Give me that letter in your hands. If you are too scrupulous to burn it, I am not, *give* it to me!"

"Miss Royce, I think you hardly understand."

"I understand *this*, that—you wish to marry Miss Fairfax."

"Leave Miss Fairfax out of it," says Verschoyle, his teeth a little on edge. "I shall never marry her. So there is an end to that question."

He strides off to the window.

"So you say—so you don't think," says Maden Royce, moving after him. She glides softly up. Her heart now is beating madly. This is her last throw. "You love her. You know you do." She lays her hand softly on his shoulder. "And you, who love her, will you sacrifice her? That letter"—he is holding is still tightly crumpled in his hand—"*you*, her *true* lover, will deliver it, knowing—the consequences? Think, *think*, what her life will be with *him!* You heard him say a little while ago that he would be *glad* if she refused him! Ask yourself, then, what her chance of happiness will be in life; a bad life is a long thing. Long——" There is a stifled pause. "*Too* long!"

She sways a little.

"Why don't you sit down?" says Anthony. "This chair——"

"No; I will stand. I am fighting for myself, Mr. Verschoyle, as you well know; but you—won't *you* fight for yourself—and for *her?*"

"What would you have me do?" asks Verschoyle, with some agitation.

"Destroy that letter, and marry her."

"I"—he grows very white—"shall never marry her."

"You can—if you only will."

She draws nearer to him—her step slow, her whole face afire as she tempts him.

"You do not understand. It is quite out of my power."

"There is no meaning in such a phrase as *that,*" cries she vehemently. "*All* things are in one's power if one only has strength and courage. Burn that vile letter, I tell you"—pointing at it with quivering fingers—"and marry her! You are a good man; you will make her happy. *She*"—with an angry contempt in her tone—"likes good men!"

"You forget——"

"I forget"—impatiently—"nothing! Mark my words; as sure as ever she accepts the proposal in that letter you hold, her life will be blighted. I warn you this night of that. I am unscrupulous. If he deserts me for her, *she* shall pay the penalty. I have followed him here to-day. . . . I shall follow him to-morrow . . . *and all his life I shall follow him!*"

There is deadly meaning in her black eyes as she says this, and Verschoyle, thinking upon Cecil,

feels his heart contract. Fragile, childish as she looks, there is something in Miss Royce's whole air that tells him she will be true to her word.

"Whether he marries Cecil Fairfax or another, or whether he never marries," goes on the clear, cold, yet passionate voice, "so long as he and I live, I shall follow him! And, as I have already told you, when *with* me I can influence him. The woman who marries him will"—with a glad lightening of her whole face, eager, vindictive—"find her life a curse to her, rather than a blessing. For I swear" —with a quick touch of fury—"that whoever he marries shall rue it. She shall know no luck or happiness in her down-lying or in her uprising, so long as breath is left in me."

Her face, always so white, is now dyed as though all the blood in her slight body has rushed into it.

"*Now,*" in a voice low but furious, "you *know.* Will you burn that letter, or condemn her to a life that will be a very *hell?* For she loves him. I knew that—I saw that—before I took him from her. If he goes back to her——"

Instinctively her small hands clench.

"It is not my letter," says Verschoyle.

"It is in your hands, however."

"Entrusted to my care——"

"What does that matter? It will never be found out. You heard him say that if he did not get an

answer to it to-morrow he would accept her silence as refusal. *Who* shall know of it save you and I? There"—flinging out her hands wildly towards the shining tiles—"is a fire: throw it in!"

She creeps to him, and, clutching his arm, shakes it fiercely.

"Throw it *in,* I say."

"I am sorry," says Verschoyle very gently, "but he gave it to me, you see; he trusted in me, and—I dare not."

"Yet you dare to risk the happiness of the woman you love!" criés she a little wildly. "Love! What sort of love is that, when just for a little point of conscience, that satisfies yourself only, you would sacrifice her, *body and soul!*"

Body and soul! Verschoyle, standing at the open window, through which the mists of night are coming, in soft multitudes, vague, gray, impalpable, knows that his thoughts are vague as they.

And yet in his hand still lies the lying letter, and it is *his* hand that is to deliver it. His to pronounce her doom!

He has been the one selected by the betrayer of Maden to bring down ruin on Cecil's gentle life. Oh, monstrous thought! Better—far better—to dare her anger, her righteous indignation, and after that her terrible humiliation, and lay bare to her the character of the man she, in her purity, loved.

But his oath! It all comes back to him suddenly. His oath to Maden never to betray her secret—an oath so freely taken only a few minutes ago. Already it begins to gall him. No. *He* cannot warn Cecil, but——

A thought has struck him; he turns quietly to Miss Royce.

"I cannot betray a trust," says he. "But you—there is a straight course for you. Why, if you wish to keep Fenton, not go to Miss Fairfax and tell her what you have told to me?"

"Oh, coward!" says she. "Are *you* afraid to face her, then?"

"I am," says he coldly. "And I am coward enough, too, to shrink from breaking my promise to you to hold your secret sacred."

This should have moved her, and it does, but not enough. To dissuade her from her full desire would have taken much more than honour, or kindliness, or . . . torture! So is she built.

Verschoyle presses his question:

"You will tell Miss Fairfax?"

"No"—the refusal rings out clear—"I shall never tell her; but—I shall wait."

"Wait! For what?"

"For the marriage-day. After that I shall wait, too."

"You have some horrible thought in your mind," says Anthony violently. "Say it!"

"Would you hear it?" She laughs imperfectly. "Well, I shall wait until he and she are one. That is the good old phrase, is it not?—one!" Her black, soft eyes now gleam with a diabolical fire. "And when they are one"—a little rippling laugh passes her lips—"I shall tell her—*all!*"

"That," says Verschoyle, speaking with difficulty because of the rage within him, "would be the work of a devil! And you"—slowly—"don't look like that."

"No?" She laughs again. "You are ignorant, then, in some points. I told you you were a good man. Good men never know anything; it is their prerogative. Yet I"—with a most audacious smile —"am not a man, and I know everything. You, very courteously, say I am not like a devil. Let me tell you, however—I like to be honest, you know, when"—with a shrug—"it suits me—let me tell you, then, just now, that if I'm not a devil exactly, I"—ominously—"*feel* like one!"

## CHAPTER XV.

"'Is this,' quoth she, 'the cause of your unrest?'
'Yea, certainly,' quoth he, 'no wonder is.'
'Now, sir,' quoth she, 'I could amend all this.'"

"I THINK you are wronging yourself," says Verschoyle calmly. "I do not believe, even now, after all you have said, that you would deliberately hurt a —a girl who had never hurt you in any way."

"Oh yes, I would," says Miss Royce, the old inscrutable look growing in her dark and lovely eyes. "Don't count on that." She glances at him. "If he marries, I shall make, not only him, but"—with the most charming air and a quick smile—"Miss Fairfax, very uncomfortable indeed."

Her voice is quite even.

"Is there no gratitude in you?" demands Verschoyle sternly. "She was kind to you. Even now —she defends you. . . . Only to-day——" He stops for a moment, as if unable to go on. "She liked you," says he presently, in a low voice. "Surely you would not harm her?"

"Her!" She represses herself by a violent effort, a dangerous light growing in her eyes the while;

and then, all at once, the barrier is cast aside, and her passion bursts forth. "Harm *her!*—the woman who would take him from me! the woman for whom, because of her accursed money, he would cast me aside!" She looks like a fury as she speaks. "Harm her! I tell you, I would willingly kill her!" Her eyes are blazing. Then, all at once, just as he is preparing himself for a further outburst, her strange, versatile mind undergoes a change. The storm dies away, giving place to a look of cold resentment, of vindictive hatred. "Beyond doubt I shall harm her, whenever I get the chance," says she. The tone is low, but Verschoyle knows that she means every syllable of what she *has* said, and what she is saying. "And if the chance does not suggest itself, I shall make one. She has shown no mercy to me; I shall show none to her."

She nods her head slowly, and again he can see the strength that lies beneath the childish face.

"Yet she befriended you."

"As a queen might a beggar"—contemptuously.

"Surely that is both unjust and ungracious."

"It may be"—calmly. "But if *she* were the beggar, and I the queen, I should still hate her, because she comes between him and me."

"Is she, then, to bear all the blame—she who is blameless?"

"All."

"Look here," says Verschoyle suddenly, "I don't believe you know what you are saying. Such injustice is mere madness. Clear your mind, and remember only that she was a friend to you, when few others were."

Miss Royce's face remains immovable.

"So were you," says she; "and so you *are*. I shall never forget this hour, or"—earnestly—"you. As for her . . . Well"—with a bitter smile that sits most sadly on her youthful face—"I shall never forget her, either; I shall remember her until death takes one of us. I tell you all this because I like you, and because I think you would be happy with her. And I tell it you, too, because I want you"—indicating the letter by a gesture—"to destroy that. . . . Burn that lie in your hand, Mr. Verschoyle"—in an eager yet stifled tone. "Think—*think* what it means to you and me! . . . And he doesn't care for her, and it is my life"—gasping—"yours and mine! Burn it! burn it!"—she breaks down—"oh, do! do!"

Again the mobile face has changed. The most pitiful expression has taken the place of the late revengeful one.

"Miss Royce———"

"Ah, no, not that tone! . . . Make yourself happy —and me, too."

"I cannot," says Verschoyle hoarsely.

"It is all over, then," says she. She comes forward. "It only remains to me to go—and meet Sidney."

It is a parting shaft, and Anthony pales beneath it, but still is firm. He makes a decisive movement of his head; then, seeing her turn away, says quietly:

"You are not going like this. You cannot possibly go until you have had something to eat."

Her pallor, her despair, has smitten him.

"No, I want nothing; no—really, Mr. Verschoyle, I mean it. Please"—in a hurried way, seeing him going towards the bell—"do not call anyone. I"—painfully—"would rather not have it known that I was here, or anywhere in this neighbourhood."

"But——" begins Verschoyle.

She certainly looks very faint and ill, but he sees at once her horror of making her presence known. He turns silently to a little cabinet, opens it, and brings out some wine and a tin of biscuits.

"You will, at all events, take this?" says he.

He pours some sherry into a glass, and takes it to her, with the biscuits. She shakes her head at the latter.

"I couldn't eat," says she faintly.

She takes the glass he offers her, however, and drinks its contents eagerly; her throat, her lips, her heart, poor soul! are all parched. A painful pity for her fills Verschoyle's soul.

"Can't I send you to your train?" asks he anxiously. "You look very tired—done up, don't you know."

His nervousness makes him a little garrulous.

"Oh no, thank you. People"—with a terribly sad glance at him—"such as I am flit here and there; they are never *sent* anywhere."

"I shall be very glad to send you anywhere," says Verschoyle, with extreme courtesy. "I feel"—he hesitates—"Miss Royce, may I say that my cousin's conduct towards you is——"

She throws up a small clenched hand.

"Not a word!"

"I am silent, then."

Verschoyle's grave face looks almost handsome now. His heart, indeed, is full of pity, of almost admiration, for her.

"I will not hear anything against him!" says Miss Royce. "No; I have told you it was my fault. . . . As for this"—she lowers her eyes, and a little shudder goes through her—"he—he must answer for himself. I do not condemn him."

Her loyalty, in the face of her own destruction, works even a stronger pity in the heart of Anthony. It wakes, too, a mad rage against Sidney, and words are on his lips to denounce him, to scathe him; but all at once he knows that such scathing will only augment the wound in the poor girl's heart, and he

draws back the words that were almost said. Instead, seeing her white and miserable yet steadfast little face, he seeks to give her comfort—of a sort.

"If I may not speak of that," says he very kindly, "I may speak, perhaps, of your generosity. You have a good heart indeed. As for him——"

She interrupts him violently:

"No; I will not hear it!"

"I was not going to offend you in any way, believe me," says Verschoyle gently; "I shall not say one word against my cousin. Indeed"—slowly—"I think, perhaps, had happier times been his, he would have been a better man. I"—meeting her eager, expectant eyes—"think that, at heart, there is some good in him."

It is the faint praise that damns, but Maden does not see that. A light of glowing joy springs into her small face, and with the joy is gratitude, so great as hardly to be determined.

"Oh, you are right," cries she; "there *is* good in him!" She claps her hands suddenly over her eyes, pressing them—*pressing* them. "Dear, dear God! how unhappy I am! Oh, there *is* good in Sidney! And"—her hands falling away from her miserable eyes—"you are as Heaven itself; you alone have seen that he is not—not altogether bad—as some, perhaps, would have it."

For the first time in all this terrible interview,

tears rise in her eyes, gleam there for a moment, then disappear. With almost superhuman strength she controls her weakness. She makes a movement towards Verschoyle.

"You have been very kind to me," says she. "I think there are very few who would have shown me so much—courtesy. I like to say this to you now, as I suppose it is the last time we shall meet. But —I shall remember your kindness always. A small return, but all I can make."

She smiles forlornly, and, as if involuntarily, makes the usual customary gesture of farewell. Quickly remembering, she draws back her hand. It is the most pitiful thing. Verschoyle's blood mounts to his face.

"Won't you shake hands with me?" asks he.

"Would you shake hands with such as me?" returns she with a hard, forced little smile, sadder than any tears.

"Miss Royce! I wish you would not speak to me like that!" exclaims Anthony, his manhood rising in arms. Taking her hand in spite of her, he holds it firmly, and with the usual warmth that one would show to a friend. Poor, poor little soul! God help her! "Do you think I judge *you?*" says he. "I judge him."

"No." She puts up one hand quietly. "No, I suppose you cannot see it . . . but if he is not, in

my sight, the most righteous man on earth, he is certainly—the dearest!"

She turns and goes quietly to the open window; as she steps into the veranda she looks back.

"You will burn it, I think," says she. "If you *don't*—you know the consequences."

Verschoyle shakes his head.

"Oh yes—you will! you will!" Moving away, a last word comes from her: "Of course you will."

She disappears in the night.

## CHAPTER XVI.

"Where are thy terrors, Conscience?
Where thy justice?"

SHE is gone, and Anthony is left alone, the letter still within his grasp.

For a long time he stands motionless, forgetful of the fact that he *is* standing, gazing with frowning brows into the fire.

What an infernal scoundrel!

His mind seems a blank but for this one thought. It seems to swallow up all others. What, indeed, is there to think of but Fenton's baseness, his incredible audacity, his——

Great Heaven! who would have suspected it? First to take away that poor child, and then, when tired of her, to come back here—here, and on the very ground of his abominable intrigue, to make love to another—to seek to bolster up his own falling fortunes with—with Cecil's fortune!

As Cecil's name comes to him, so does all the rest, and, dropping into a chair, he gives his mind full sway. He remembers how, not an hour ago, with growing rage, he had heard Fenton speak, in

his cynical way, of his possible marriage with Cecil —a marriage that was to be all love on her side, none on his. But the indignation he then felt sinks into a feeble resentment, when compared with the fury that now possesses him.

Was it Heaven or Hell sent that girl to-night to tell him of her connection with this man? Man! the word is too fine—this scoundrel who, having destroyed the life of one human creature, would now with smiling face begin the destruction of another. For Cecil, with her delicate sensibilities, her high ideals, would be not one whit less miserable with him, as his wife, than the other—poor soul!—has been as his mistress. Surely it was Heaven sent the warning, before this letter, that must now be considered fatal, should be sent. A warning to stay his hand, too—— He rises and goes to the hearthrug. The fire seems to draw him. Leaning his arm upon the mantelpiece, he looks down into the glowing, inviting flames beneath.

"Burn it," she had said; and Maden's face, as she stood before him, now fierce, now beseeching, shines at him out of the heart of the fire. Her own heart had not burned more fiercely with her wrongs —her fears.

"You love her! Will you, then, sacrifice her?" Maden's voice rings in his ears. Her presence seems still to pervade the silent, darkened library. "I shall

follow her." She had been threatening then, and there was not only a threat, but defiance and determination in her air—a determination to ruin Cecil's life should Fenton marry her. "I shall tell her;" and then again, "So long as he and I are alive I shall follow him;" and again, "He has shown no mercy to *me;* I shall show none to *her.*"

She meant it. She meant every word she said, and therefore this letter—he crushes it between his fingers—when sent, will condemn Cecil to a life of long, of sure misery, to a regret too terrible for contemplation.

He knows Cecil as perhaps no one else does, his love for her having created a clear path to her mind—her purity, her contemptuous horror of deceit, of treachery of any kind. And surely Fenton's proposal to her under the present circumstances is the deepest of all treacheries, the basest of all deceptions. He draws his clasped hands from behind his back, and glances at the superscription on the letter:

"MISS FAIRFAX,

*"Fairtown."*

It is no doubt open to him to go to her, to lay the bare, disreputable facts before her, to give voice to the whole painful story. It is open to him, but, as he knows, impossible. He has given his oath to that poor girl to hold her sad secret sacred, and an

oath once given is not to be recalled; and he knows, too, that had it to be given all over again he would still adhere to that oath; or—an oath *never* given—he would still have found it impossible to give to the world Maden's most melancholy story.

As it is, she has thrown herself upon his honour—upon his mercy, which, perhaps, means the same thing. No, he cannot betray her.

The letter! The letter, then. What is to be done with it? . . . Is it to go to Cecil, for her everlasting despair? A horrible pang of jealousy at his heart warns him that if it is sent to Cecil she will undoubtedly accept the proposal it contains. She will not even hesitate. She will accept the dishonourable thing, believing it, in the light of her own sweetness, to be true and earnest—the outcome of a heart devoted to her.

And once accepted, the sorry farce will be carried out to the end. She, the wife, believing always, loving, trusting—until the crash comes. He, the husband, acting a sordid part, and, no doubt, longing for the crash that will be her doom and his release. No doubt he will so manage as to make the terms of their separation very advantageous for himself.

Great Heaven, what a prospect for her!

And here, in his hands—in the hands of the man who truly loves her—her fate lies. He looks

again at the letter. . . . Her fate! A small, plaintive voice comes back again.

"You love her; will you, then, sacrifice her?"

He draws his breath sharply. If the letter goes she will be sacrificed, and by him—by him! But——

He leans a little heavily on the mantelshelf now, and a slight moisture grows upon his brow. . . . But how if it should not go? If she should never get it?

Instinctively the hand holding the letter thrusts itself towards the fire—then is drawn back again. No; the end is not yet.

Fenton had said in it that if he got no answer to-morrow he would accept her silence as refusal. So. . . . His brows meet in frowning thought. . . . Should Cecil not get this infamous letter, then, certainly, she can send no answer, and there will be an end to it all.

Once again he holds out his hand, with the letter in it, holding it over the brightest flame, and once again he draws it back.

Oh for a just decision! If only he himself did not love her, it might be easily made, but——

Is it, then, *because* he loves her, he has not the strength to save her? "You love her; will you, then, sacrifice her?" The wild, plaintive voice of the woman Fenton has so cruelly wronged rings in his ears again. Shall he send the letter, and thus, wilfully—knowing

all things—make the one woman he loves unhappy for life, or———

The minutes speed by. The sudden striking of the little ormolu clock upon the mantelshelf reminds him that now or never is his decision to be made. If she gets it within half an hour she will be able to answer it in time for the post that will reach Ingham to-morrow morning. If not———

Mechanically he rouses himself and goes to the bell. He can summon a messenger. Of course, she must have it. Of course—she———

His hand is on the bell.

Suddenly he turns, walks quickly to the fire, and in a moment the letter is caught in the flames and reduced to a filmy, blackened nothing.

* * * * *

He watches it as it grows lighter, and still ever lighter—this small bit of useless burnt paper that a moment ago had held the meaning of four lives—till at last, a draught catching it, it floats upwards and is lost for ever in the recesses of the chimney. So it is gone!

He had watched its going with a strange fascination, but now that it is beyond his sight the glamour is broken, and the enormity of this thing that he has done comes home to him, and with it a great horror.

Dishonour!

The word brings a hot flush to his forehead. It seems to crush him. He who had held his head so high, who had spent so many hours only this very night in scorning Fenton, how is he now superior to him? Truly, dishonour has come to sit and sup with him to-night, to be his guest for ever.

A mad desire to retrace his steps takes possession of him. One boat must be left . . . he cannot have burned them *all*. It is still possible to write to Fenton—to explain. . . . That will be, however, to betray the secret Miss Royce gave into his keeping; but, then, only to her betrayer—scarcely to be called a treachery. And even now she must be with him, and has, no doubt, told him all—her knowledge of the contents of the letter, her interview with him, Verschoyle—all.

Yes, he will write to Sidney, openly declare his knowledge of his past, of his relations with Miss Royce, and explain how, on the head of it, he had destroyed the letter committed to his care, believing, if it were sent, it might cause grave trouble to Cecil in the future. If Sidney should, after this, still have the want of conscience to press his suit on Miss Fairfax, he must, at all events, find another means of conveying his proposal to her. He, Anthony, declined to be associated with it in any way. In the meantime, Sidney might understand that the infamous story of his conduct towards a young girl living under

his aunt's protection would be a dangerous thing to give to the world. It should remain a secret between him and "Yours faithfully, ANTHONY VERSCHOYLE."

When Verschoyle, after many attempts, finally knocks off this explanation to his cousin, and looks at the clock, he finds it is already too late for the next post, that would have taken it to Ingham in time to be delivered at mid-day to-morrow. He gives way to a burst of rage, born of his desire to get this disgraceful act of his set right, and, as a first thought, decides on sending a groom post-haste to Ingham, riding half through the night if need be. He does not know the exact mileage between here and Ingham. A moment's thought, however, cools him down. Such a long ride at this hour would give rise to speculation in the servants'-hall, the usual hotbed of most private scandals; and should the groom he sent by chance discover that Miss Royce was also at Ingham, why, then—then . . . why, then it would come to Cecil's ears, and hurt her to her white heart's core.

No; he will wait. It is unfortunate, irritating, but not of any serious importance. Fenton will certainly go straight to his rooms in town from Ingham, and there receive the letter. It will be the delay of only a few hours really, and from town he can, if he is so greatly daring, write again to Cecil.

And he will—Verschoyle feels sure of this. His hand shakes as he re-addresses the letter that is, at all events, to explain to Fenton the dishonourable act of which he has been guilty.

He stands up, and takes a step towards the door with the intention of putting the letter in the bag, then stops. What is this thing he is doing? Saving his own honour at the cost of *her* misery—the misery of the woman he loves!

"Will you sacrifice her, then?"

*His* conscience will be clear. Cecil's life will be one long torture. Could selfishness go deeper? As in a dream he can see her—proud, cold, uncomplaining to the last, but with a soul killed, a heart crushed, lifeless, desecrated.

No—a thousand times no! A smothered cry breaks from him. The dishonour, the shame, be his—the humiliation, if the truth be ever known; but for her—safety, calm, peace . . . an escape from such stress and storm as in her pure heart had never been so much as imagined.

He walks to the fire, very deliberately this time, and flings his own letter into it, after Sidney's. His face has a determined look in it as he turns away. There is no fear, no remorse, now. His mind is quite made up and satisfied, whatever the conse-

quences of his act may be. He has done his best for her; it is a point of conscience. Well, if he is wrong, why, it is *his* conscience, not hers, that will go to the wall.

## CHAPTER XVII.

"For what wert thou to me?
How shall I say?"

FEBRUARY has slipped easily into March, and March—noisiest of months,

"Whose blithe reveille blows from hill to hill."

—has given place to April, and all day long death is giving place to life.

The little beechlings—tiny, baby things, with only two soft, rounded leaves, the backs of which gleam in the fitful sunlight like white satin—are swaying faintly in the lively breeze. It seems almost past belief that these delicate things can ever reach to man's estate, ever grow to the size of their giant forefathers, up, up, above them, sheltering them with their broad branches. Yet grow they do, and so do all the rest of the sweet nurslings in this best of all possible months.

Dear Spring; of whom one's thoughts grow always dearer; who catches one with a madness when young, with a tenderness when old. When its

thrall is on us, how are we to escape it, to think of anything but—

"Of Spring which breaks with all her leaves,
Of birds that build in thatch and eaves,
Of woodlands where the throstle calls,
Of girls that gather cowslip balls.
* * * *
Of brooks that sing by brambly ways?"

With the coming of the late spring has come, too, to Hillesden the announcement first of Miss Fairfax's engagement to Anthony Verschoyle, to be followed very shortly after by the marriage itself. The bridegroom had brooked no delay, and the bride had given in to his wishes with what seemed, to Hillesden upper, extraordinary indifference; to Hillesden lower, very unnecessary obedience before marriage.

Anthony had waited many weeks before asking her to marry him—waited for another sign from Fenton, but plainly nothing came. Later on he heard he had gone abroad. Cecil had heard it, too—with what mingled feelings of shame and grief no man, or woman either, for the matter of that, ever knew. The scene on the terrace, when he had held her hand—had said words that she fondly believed contained the germs of a declaration of love to her—is always with her. She had waited that evening, and all next day, dreaming of his return; and even

when she knew that he had gone—gone without a final glance, even—she still for many days dwelt on the thought of a day that would bring a letter from him to her, that should dissolve all her doubts, and change them into happy certainties.

But that day never came, and slowly, slowly, she woke to the fact that he had never loved her, or else that, loving her (in her inmost soul she believed in his love), he had found good reason to abstain from attaching himself to her for life. And so he

"Loved, and he rode away."

She had a great deal of pride, and she rose to the occasion. Whatever she suffered, she and her heart knew only, and to the outer world she was as she had ever been—calm, sweet, sympathetic. But in silence, when alone in the darkness of the growing, warm spring nights, she suffered. It seemed to her that she was left alone—desolate—one sad creature without kith or kin! All the sweetness of the growing year was around her; all things grew and loved; she—she alone—was unsought.

She read a good deal at this time, preferring saddest thoughts, and at night some of them would come and stay with her, cruelly tormenting her, and making the tired eyes drop their usual tears faster and faster.

"Bees hum all day amid the young spring leaves,
The rooks caw loud from every elm-tree bough,
The sparrows twitter in the old church eaves,
But no voice cries for me, or calls me now."

To such sad beliefs she gave herself, until Anthony, taking heart of grace from her very indifference to all things in this "languorous spring," made love to her in strong, right-down fashion, and so in measure changed her mood. Impossible to say to oneself that "No voice calls me now," when a lover's voice is ever at your ear.

In time Cecil grew contented, if not satisfied; and from being contented, to—in spite of herself—find much comfort in Tony's presence. It even came natural to her, after a week's engagement, to call him Tony always, without an occasional Anthony—much to Lady Maria's delight, who saw in it a touch of growing love for Verschoyle, and who, being very fond of Cecil, was charmed at the approaching marriage. She had been somewhat surprised at the girl's ready acceptance of Anthony's proposal, because, although always eager to receive Cecil as a daughter-in-law, she had not believed she was in love with her son. But once the engagement became *un fait accompli,* she told Mrs. Verschoyle (who felt secretly a little uneasy about the success of the marriage) that she was the happiest mother alive.

And so it took place. Carry Desmond, who was

chief bridesmaid, in a charming gown bought out of the few pounds left over from the payment of auntie's debt after the sale of the rabbits, thought Cecil very pale, but wonderfully bright.

"And, you know, Richie, I quite looked for other things; because, as I told you often, I'm perfectly sure she was in love with Sidney. You remember my saying it."

"Yes; and as I said then I say now—rot!" says Mr. Amyot. "I wonder how a sensible girl like you can imagine such a folly as that."

"It isn't folly"—angrily. "Only"—contemptuously—"you can't see anything; men never can!"

"That's right; give yourself airs," says Mr. Amyot. "Of course, now you have taken to bree——"

The remainder of his sentence, for one strong reason, is lost to posterity.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

"Is it rapture or terror that circles me round, and invades
Each vein of my life with hope—if it be not fear?"

And now the marriage is over, and here, in this great world of London, in this big hotel, where Anthony has secured rooms for them, Cecil begins to feel herself a little lost. For one thing, she has just discovered that her maid has forgotten to put in her evening shoes, of all things; and her maid is not expected to join her until nine to-night. How on earth is she to get on without them? She has pulled off her walking shoes and her stockings with a view to putting on a dainty pair of embroidered ones, and an even daintier pair of shoes, and is now standing with her little naked feet thrust into her red Turkish bath slippers.

Ah, she ought to have brought Hatchett with her. She could have gone into Regent Street and bought her a pair of shoes in a moment. And now Anthony is waiting for her in the charming little sitting-room just across the corridor, and——

Suddenly it occurs to her that Anthony might be of use on this disastrous occasion. Anthony!

She laughs involuntarily. Fancy making a servant of Anthony! Then something else occurs to her: the knowledge that in him she has someone who will always, and most willingly, be servant to her—one to whom her lightest request will be as law; one who will never desire to leave her; one who, however . . . cannot be dismissed.

This thought troubles her very little. She had always been fond of Verschoyle, and during these past weeks of her engagement to him had grown nearer to him, fonder of him, perhaps, than she herself knows. His gentleness, his tenderness, his intuitive knowledge of the small things that will please her, have pierced through her sad indifference, and made him not only dear, but actually necessary to her. She laughs again, the old girlish laugh that for many months has not made sweet her lips, as she tells herself that now no longer need she ever think or trouble about any mortal thing. Tony, her husband, will take all that upon his broad shoulders, even her shoes.

She opens the door, looks cautiously up and down the corridor, sees no one, but still hesitates. These slippers! She glances down at them disparagingly, yet they are twin charms in themselves —small, elaborately embroidered, and as *chic* as though made for the "Light of the Harem" herself in some "unspeakable" Turk's home. Evidently she

forgives them, because, after another hasty glance up and down the corridor, she runs to the sitting-room beyond, where she knows Anthony is awaiting her.

"Just fancy," says she, her usual delicate colour a little warmer, "Hatchett forgot to put in any of my shoes!"

He has risen, and is coming quickly towards her.

"Except these," says she, putting up a hand to stay him. As she speaks she smiles, and draws back her skirts with both hands to show the Turkish slippers beneath, and the little pearly-white feet within them that the kindly slippers only half conceal. "And they," says she, with a rueful glance, "will hardly do to go about in, in this house, will they?"

"True. They are much too pretty," says Anthony.

She laughs.

"Well! but what shall I do? Would you"—she glances at him—"will you——" She hesitates, and blushes, softly, shyly; she has hardly realised as yet, indeed, that he is her husband, in spite of her thoughts of a few moments ago in her own room; and to ask him to do such a trivial thing as this—this man, who only yesterday she would not have dreamed of asking to bring her so much as a rose—to ask him now to buy her so intimate a thing as a pair of shoes!

"What is there I wouldn't do for you?" says he, breaking into her gentle confusion.

"I know . . . but——"

"But what?" He has taken both her hands. "Come, now. Is that a way to ask your husband to buy shoes for you? It should be, 'Anthony, go out at once, and buy me the prettiest pair of shoes in town.'"

"Is that the way?" She gives him a glance, saucy, if shy. It is as wine to Verschoyle's heart. Later on she will learn to love him. She will be his indeed. "How do you know?"

"Instinct," says he.

"Nonsense! Instinct has been overdone."

"Well, then, I've known poor fellows who've been through the mill before me, who have been married men for a long, long time. But all this is irrelevant. I feel I am going to be the most abject of the lot. I'm beginning well, you see." He points to her feet. "Any particular shop?"

"You know more about town than I do," says she.

She slips her hand into her pocket and pulls out her purse and hands it to him. He does not take it, and a little change of expression in his eyes attracts her attention. Will she always, then, keep him at a distance? It is this thought that has brought that expression to his eyes.

"The old days are over," says he, pushing back

her hand with the purse in it. "Would you deprive me of one of my greatest privileges?"

"No." She turns away, her first blush now a crimson red, and lays her purse upon the mantelpiece. "It is all so strange," says she in a faint tone, full of apology, and of tears too—a tone that, taken altogether, heals the wound at once.

"I must take your measure," says Verschoyle, "before I go." He drops on his knees, and, pulling off one of the Oriental slippers, takes her bare foot into his palm. "Oh, dear little foot!" says he breathlessly, half silently.

Yet Cecil, waiting, feels with a faint thrill the lingering tightening of his fingers over it.

Pulling out his handkerchief, he measures the small foot, not once or twice, either.

"You know it now—you *must,*" says she, quickly drawing back the foot from him.

"I must, I suppose," returns he regretfully. He bends over her, and passionately, tenderly, kisses her instep twice. Then he springs to his feet.

As he does so he astonishes a look in her eyes —a look strange to him—and, driven by a vehement impulse, he catches her in his arms, straining her to his heart.

"You love me, Cecil?" It is a question.

"Yes, yes," as if a little frightened.

Suddenly he holds her back from him.

"Oh no, you do not. Not yet, but you will—you will . . . in time."

"I think I do . . . now," says she, nervously, indeed, but with such a pretty, reliant, if shy glance at him, as sets his heart beating.

"You mean that, Cecil?"

She is in his arms now, and her eyes are answering his.

"I do. I—I think so . . . Tony! I want my shoes."

She pushes him from her; it is a very delicate little push, but he gives way to it.

* * * * *

All down the corridor, and far into the street, and into the shop where such shoes as his beloved would deign to wear can be found, he goes; his hope, his belief in her final love for him, and him only, going with him, with leaps and bounds.

After all, he had done well to destroy that letter—a letter that inevitably would have made havoc of her life. And soon—though her love may not yet be his—soon she will love him, and him only.

Already her heart is opening to him. Would she have come to him just now as she did if she had not felt some love for him in her heart? And that light he had surprised in her dear eyes? That

alone gave hope for a future that might yet be resplendent with joy indescribable.

An old cripple standing at the turn of the hotel that leads into Regent Street is surprised at having half a crown dropped into his grimy hand, as Verschoyle goes by him, hailing a hansom to take him to a certain fashionable shop—a shop for shoes—a little lower down in Regent Street.

Cecil, left alone, stands motionless by the fireplace. Lifting her eyes at last, she sees her purse resting on the marble slab above her. It brings her mind to a focus.

She takes it up, and holding it, looking at it, falls a-thinking. How kindly he had looked at her just now! How gently he had spoken! How delicately he had let her know that now, from this time forward, she belonged to him, and him only! He had taken her into his care, his keeping—surely a good keeping.

How kind, how thoughtful, he has always been, and how strong! A man far beyond all petty sins, all dishonourable beliefs. And gentle, too. And more—oh, much, much more!

She breaks off her thoughts abruptly.

Is she? Can it be true? Does she?

Oh no! Impossible! She pokes the fire with the toe of her Turkish slipper, and gives herself a little shake. Is she growing sentimental about no-

thing? . . . Still, to be unjust! . . . And, after all, he *is* nice. And there is something in the fact of having someone to look after one always, to love one, to get one's tickets, and order about one's tenants, and perhaps . . . perhaps . . . well, perhaps everything has been ordered for the best.

Would . . . that other . . . Fenton's eyes rise before her, caught out of the depths of a dead past. Would he have been as kind, as good? How near he seems to-night—that other! . . . And yet . . . what kind eyes Anthony has! Carry had always said they were handsome. . . . She rouses herself abruptly. She will go back to her room. She can put on her pretty black silk stockings, at all events, whilst waiting for Anthony's return with the desired shoes.

Opening the door, she goes out boldly into the corridor, forgetting now the fact that someone may meet her, and, having gone a yard or so, finds herself face to face with Sidney Fenton.

## CHAPTER XIX.

"Then came the Winter, with his frosty breath,
And made the world an image of white Death."

A SPASM contracts her heart for a moment. It is not born of pain so much, perhaps, as of a horror of past hateful memories. It is hard for a woman to forget a slight—when the slight is given by a man.

He to be here—he! And to-day, of all days!

The lamps have been lit now, and the corridor is ablaze with their many fires.

"Fancy meeting you here!" she says, a little hurriedly, perhaps, but with extraordinary self-possession, considering how her heart is beating.

"My dear Cecil, surely all the astonishment should be on my side!" says Fenton, with a charming smile. He is looking extremely handsome, and, as usual, on very good terms with himself. "To say nothing of the joy." He bears her no ill-will on account of that answer to his proposal that never came. "How often I have wished that we could be in town together, that I might take you about, and shown you all the smart things, in which"—smiling

—"in spite of your pretence at asceticism, I'm sure your soul delights. When did you come?"

"To-day." He does not notice how faint her voice has grown.

"Only to-day! How fortunate! Then you can't be in a hurry back. And just now everything is full up. It promises to be a splendid season." His voice, his whole air, is full of vitality. "How long are you going to remain?"

"I hardly know." Even fainter grows her tone.

"In leading-strings, then, of course! Who are you with?"

"I am married," says she slowly.

"Married!"

"I am with Anthony!"

There is a moment's silence, that, for her, seems to contain a year's suspense.

"By Jove!" says he. And then, "Anthony!" He is too surprised to say more. Verschoyle, of all men on earth!

"Lucky Anthony!" exclaims he presently, with a would-be rueful glance. Though, now that she is really beyond his reach, she seems to him all at once fairer, lovelier. And what a fetching gown that is she is wearing! Yes, she is prettier than he ever had believed her. Was she as pretty as that in the old days? "You might at least have written to let me know," he goes on, in an aggrieved tone.

Not that he feels in the least aggrieved—a little chagrined, perhaps, no more; but all pretty women like to think one pines for them for ever. And besides, for the life of him, he cannot suppress the suggestion of passionate admiration, the cheap suspicion of eternal adoration, that he has been accustomed to lay at the feet of those whom for the moment he admires. "But I know"—meaningly—"writing is not much in your line. Sometimes even you do not condescend to answer a letter that might be of importance to the *sender,* at all events—do you? At least, so I have found it. But"—reproachfully—"after all that *once* was between us"—effective pause—"you might, at least, have allowed me the small satisfaction of sending you a wedding-present."

Cecil makes no answer. A wave of indignation has crossed her face. What had passed between them? If he remembers. . . . Then to speak to her like this. . . . It is a direct insult. Why is not Anthony here?

"So it was Verschoyle all the time," says Fenton. "How quiet you kept it! But do you think that secrecy was quite fair to me?"

"Sidney!" cries she sharply. There is anger, pain, and something else, in her voice. It is either regret or some faint shadow of it.

"Oh, of course, I know. I must say nothing

now, and Anthony is your husband, and he is the one superlative in the world, and the rest of it." He laughs a little disagreeably, and shrugs his shoulders. This *épanchement* is growing a little troublesome. "And Anthony, I confess, is as good a sort as one is likely to meet. And rich. You did very well, very wisely, when you elected to throw me over!"

"I!" Her voice sounds stifled. "What do you mean? Why say such stupid things? Is it a jest? I—you say—*I* threw you over?"

"At all events," says he, a little curtly, nettled by her manner, "you might have had the courtesy to answer my last letter."

A long pause.

"Your letter?" She has taken a step towards him; her eyes are fixed on his.

"The letter I wrote you the day before I left."

"Ah! you are thinking of some other letter —some other friend," says she, smiling, but very pale.

"I am not, indeed. I wrote you a letter, and gave it into safe hands, to be delivered to you within an hour. I waited all the next day for the answer to it; but, you see"—with a shrug—"you were bent on refusing me."

"Refusing you!" she stammers. Her face is like death now, her eyes looking unnaturally large

in the pallor of their surroundings. "This letter, then——" Her voice fails her.

"Held the presumptuous hope that you would deign to marry me." He laughs a little. "I told you in it, that if you did not mean to say 'Yes,' you were not to answer it. Well, you evidently did not mean 'Yes.'"

"No opportunity was given me to say 'Yes' or 'No,'" says she, in a low, strange voice; "because I never got your letter."

"No? . . . You mean to say you never got it!" exclaims he involuntarily. Then, as if recollecting, he stops suddenly; and, because the worst people have their good moments, he begins to wish his tongue had been cut out before he began this thing.

"Where did you post it?" asks she coldly.

"Post it?" He stops; his hesitation at this critical moment is fatal. "'Pon my word I can't remember."

"Ah, *I* remember now," says she sharply; "you said you gave it to someone to send on to me."

"*Did* I?"

"To whom?"—peremptorily, And as he hesitates—"To whom?" she repeats, with icy determination. Her usually pale complexion is now a dreadful white.

"One of the servants," says Fenton hastily.

"That is a lie," returns she very quietly. "You gave it to no servant. It was to Anthony you gave it." She waits for a moment. "Speak!" cries she at last.

He makes a violent gesture of denial, that only the more confirms her in her awful belief.

"Not another word," says she. "It is quite plain, quite clear. It was Anthony to whom you gave it."

"He must have forgotten it, then—mislaid it," says Fenton with agitation. To do him justice, he would not have betrayed Anthony wilfully to gain any object on earth. "I'd swear by Verschoyle," says he. "He is incapable of a dishonourable action."

"So it seems." She looks full at Fenton, and her smile is very bitter. "Tell me one thing, however: Did he know the contents of your letter?"

"No! On my honour. No!" says Fenton, lying very readily and pleasantly.

Cecil, passing him, goes *not* to her room, but back again to the drawing-room, to wait for the return of her husband.

Much relieved by the speedy termination o what had threatened to be a scene, Fenton, stepping into the lift, gives way to his thoughts. Verschoyle, of all fellows! By Jove! he'd never have believed it. Last man on earth to do a thing like that. Gone

on her himself, of course; but . . . a low sort of trick like that! And Tony, who took rather a high tone. Well, you never can say what a man will do when a woman is in question.

Maden Royce, though she had confessed, or, rather, flung in his teeth, the fact that she had deliberately listened on the balcony, outside the library window at The Towers, to the reading of his letter to Miss Fairfax, had for all that withheld a good deal. For example, she had said nothing of her interview with Verschoyle, or of—a few other things.

## CHAPTER XX.

"Ah, yet would God that stems and roots were bred
Out of my weary body and my head;
That sleep were sealed upon me with a seal,
And I were as the least of all the dead!"

ANTHONY, a few minutes later, coming up in the very lift that had taken Fenton down, walks smartly up the corridor to the pretty drawing-room, an extremely large and unfashionable parcel in his hands. He had refused to have it sent. He would take it himself, he said, and the man, though a little surprised at his wanting to drive about town with half a dozen pair of shoes, as they were paid for, after a struggle gave in.

"Here still, darling?" says he as he enters the room . . . then stops.

Is *this* the girl he had left, the gentle, shy, almost loving girl—this white, proud creature, whose glance is a stab? He flings the parcel on to a table near, and goes straight up to her. All at once he knows. His sin, if it was a sin, has found him out.

"Don't come nearer," says she, in a very low

tone. And then: "Where is the letter Sidney gave you for me the night before he left Hillesden?"

She is searching his face with eager, burning eyes. God only knows what hope was in her mind before he came; but whatever it was, it is now dashed to pieces. He starts perceptibly, and a dark red suffuses his face for a moment. It goes, and leaves him ghastly.

"You got it, then," says she, in a terrible tone.

She shrinks back from him, scorn, horror, contempt, upon her face. She seems taller than she did half an hour ago . . . such a *little* time. And so stern, so unforgiving, and . . . so beautiful.

"Yes."

"You"—with still some small hope in her wide, questioning eyes—"you didn't know what was in it, however?"

"Yes, I knew what was in it."

A pause, during which her whole life tumbles to atoms at her feet—

> "Battlements and wall,
> And gates, and bridge, and all,
> And nothing left."

"You knew?"

"Yes, I knew!"

He does not lower his eyes before hers. It seems, indeed, as if he cannot take his eyes off her. So this is to be the end of it, he is saying to himself.

"You!" She chokes a moment. "It is not true," she says. "He told me himself, only just now, that you did not know."

"I'm afraid"—with a cold smile—"that also was untrue! You have seen Fenton, then?"

"Just now—outside there—in the corridor. I thank God I have. He"—she draws her breath sharply—"*said* you did not know."

"He was very kind!" says Anthony, whose temper has now entirely deserted him. He—that devil—that *he* should be here to-night! Had he arranged for it?

"You say he lied?" says she.

"I said he was very kind."

Cecil's hands clench involuntarily. What is she to believe—whom?

"Are all men liars, then?" cries she vehemently.

"I'm afraid you have not studied your Bible very diligently," says Anthony, with a touch of insolent amusement.

At this moment he feels he could kill her . . . because he so passionately loves her.

"A taunt is not an answer," says she. "I ask you, is there no truth anywhere? Is all the world just one hideous, living lie? If *you* lie, and if *he* lies——" She breaks off. "But for him . . . his lie at least was noble. He perjured himself to save you!"

A slow but strange sneer curves Anthony's lips.

"I told you he was kind," says he.

"I don't believe he lied," says Cecil suddenly. "You say you knew what was in that letter?"

"One wastes time going over old ground like this." He shrugs his shoulders. "Yes, I knew."

"Oh, impossible! *How* could you know, unless, indeed"—her face grows alive with scorn once more —*"you read it?"*

He looks at her, and there is something in his glance that compels her to lower her eyes. Tall and slender as she is, he seems at this moment to tower over her.

"It is your privilege," says he quite calmly, "to insult me with impunity. No; I did not read it. It was read to me."

"Read to you?"

"By Sidney himself. He read it aloud, to see if I approved of—his style, perhaps, before sending it. He knew you to be a little particular."

Something here—some wretched touch of merriment born of the wretched situation—drives him into a most unseemly laugh. *She* to be particular, and to love that libertine!

But she does not heed his laughter. She stares at him; her face has whitened.

"You said he read aloud to you the letter in which he asked me to marry him?"

"That very letter."

"I can't believe you. I don't"—violently. "You who could withhold a letter that did not belong to you, could say anything. You—who———"

Suddenly he turns upon her.

"How dare you!" says he in a low but furious tone, that makes her draw back. "Take the truth as it is, but do not go beyond it. I got the letter to deliver—I did not deliver it. That is all."

"It is not all!" cries she. She has recovered from the slight shock he has given her. "There is more, much more to be said between us. You say, knowing the contents of that letter, that you deliberately kept it back from me, its rightful owner."

"Deliberately."

"But why—why?" demands she, throwing out her hands. She has advanced a step nearer to him, and her face, upraised to his, looks stricken as if by some mortal illness. To Verschoyle it is as a manifestation of her love for Fenton that has survived all things—and it maddens him. Had he only known it, she has not one thought for Fenton now. "There must have been some reason, some excuse."

"There was no excuse," declares he heavily.

So it seems to him now, indeed, though at the moment he burned the letter he had been full of excuses for the act. Then it seemed almost a laudable deed—now it stands out red as a veritable

crime. The horror, the awful wonder, in her beautiful eyes makes more clear to him the enormity of it. Nothing could gloss over or condone the fact that he had kept back, and of set will burned, a letter meant for another; kept it back, too, after its having been entrusted to him—after his promise given that it should be delivered to her for whom it was written.

It had seemed quite a simple thing, only yesterday, to assure himself that when he put that letter in the fire he had done it for *her* sake, for *her* good; to save her from a scoundrel, a libertine, and one who had openly declared he felt no real affection for her—not even friendship!

But now all such past reasoning seems but as specious pleading for a lost cause. And yet, and yet—he would do it all over again, if it had to be done, for her sake.

"None!" She is trembling now from head to foot. "You can stand there and tell me that!"

He is quite silent; and racked and torn by her torment, her enforced calm gives way.

"For God's sake say something!" she bursts out desperately. "Say, at least, that there was a *reason*."

She has drawn closer to him. There is still anger and condemnation in her eyes, but with them a strong appeal. In his present passionate rage against her and Fate and all things, he can see no-

thing but the condemnation. Well, so be it. She has elected to believe that hound's lightest word against her lifelong knowledge of him. She shall abide by her choice. A reason! Truly there had been a reason. And a strong one. The base betrayal of *another* woman by the man whom she, Cecil, even *now* delights to honour! If he could lay bare the whole truth to her at this moment, the triumph would lie with him—the humiliation with her.

But his oath to Maden lies heavy on him. Her pale, miserable, revengeful face rises before him in even this supreme moment—a face that had trusted him. No, he will not disclose her confidence. He has sunk low enough; he will sink no further. He will not give away a woman's secret to save himself.

"There was a reason, but I cannot give it to you."

"To me! Now! At this moment! You have a reason that might explain everything, and you refuse to give it!"

Her breath is coming hard and heavily. It is her very life she is fighting for. If this man is really base and unworthy, what lies before her? Nothing, save modern slavery; save to be tied—bound for ever—to a man whose own lips have branded him as liar and traitor.

"I refuse," says he.

"You compel me to believe, then, that you de-

liberately kept back that letter for purposes of your own?"

"I compel you to nothing."

His voice takes a harsher note.

"You compel me to think"—icily—"that you did this dishonourable thing to further your own aims, to gain your own ends, to—marry me *and my fortune.*"

If, in the bitterness of her spirit, she had meant to crush him, she has failed. He laughs contemptuously.

"Why should I want your fortune?" says he. "That taunt might touch the man you love; it cannot come near me. There is no excuse for me, not one. I have told you that. But I burned that letter, not because"—with a smile that seems to scorch her—"I desired your fortune, but because I loved you. You were my very life, as you well know." Were! Her heart hardens. "Indeed, at that time I would willingly have sacrificed my life for you."

"And"—her voice vibrating with contempt—"your honour, too, it seems."

"True"—coldly. "I find I have sacrificed both. May I ask what you propose to do?"

"Do?"

"Do you"—coldly—"desire a separation?"

"Not an open one," returns she in a stifled tone. 'Think of all that would be said—the talk—the

scandal—and your mother. It would not break her heart."

"No! Only mine"—grimly. "My mother is still in favour, then? As for me——" He pauses. Suddenly his face grows dark; he takes a step towards her. "You forget I am your husband," says he in a voice impossible to translate.

At this her courage, all the angry strength that was in her, dies away. She grows as pale as ashes. A low, quivering, shocked cry breaks from her.

"My husband! Oh no—no, no!"

There is such concentrated fear, such horror, such intense loathing, in her whole air, that Verschoyle, turning on his heel, leaves the room, and the house.

When he is gone Cecil creeps towards a table, and now, utterly unstrung, flings herself into a chair near it, burying her face upon her arms. Some of her lovely hair has come unbound, and flows over the prone arms. She looks like what she is, an image of despair.

Yet, through this violent distress—this knowledge that already her young life has come to a most dishonourable end—a little thrill of relief lightens her burden.

He—Sidney—had not been untrue, then. He had not humiliated her in her own eyes. He *had*

asked her to marry him. He had desired her as his wife.

Her self-respect seems all at once given back to her—resuscitated, as it were. But—and here her thoughts grow dark again, her anger rises afresh. All this past misery she has endured; the silent misery of the woman who believes herself slighted by the man whom she has deigned to love—all this must be laid to the charge of the man who has married her. He it was who had made her suffer as she did. To him are due the long sleepless nights of waiting—wondering; the cruel nights that told her she had been too tender in her manner to Sidney, that he had but amused himself with her, leaving her when it suited him to find others, fairer, dearer. Dear Heaven! what nights those had been, and how she had suffered! Would a lifetime blot out the memory of them, or help her to forgive the man who had caused them?

No—a thousand times no! She stands up, flinging back the loosened, beautiful hair from her haggard face. She may live with him before the public to save appearances—she is not of those who would court the curiosity of the crowd—but for the rest——

She moves impatiently, and her arm coming in coutact with the brown parcel on the table that Anthony had brought to her, it rolls heavily to the ground and breaks open.

Out of one of the white boxes a little pair of shoes fall helplessly. Mechanically she picks them up.

Shoes—and for her! shoes—and how pretty! Was that what was in his hand as he came in—shoes for her?

Her hands have grown very cold. She turns the pretty things backwards and forwards absently. He has good taste. And how well he knew what she would like. . . . He must have studied her. . . . He had seemed glad as he came in. . . . Such beautiful shoes—and for her!

## CHAPTER XXI.

"My heart is sad and heavy
In this merry month of May,
As I stand beneath the lime-tree
On the bastion old and gray."

ONCE again spring, that "goeth all in white," is with us, and the whole wide world is decked with happy smiles. The land is "scattered with light," and from tree to tree, from bush to eave, the sounds of merry twitterings echo and re-echo. So warm it is to-day, that all the buds of yesterday are nearly blown, and in the orchards

"The apple-trees in May,
Whose green leaves make a little, tender night,
With flowers for stars,"

are making the hours more lovely.

The close of this most heavenly May is near at hand, and the Verschoyles, who have been home from their honeymoon quite a month—it had been a shorter honeymoon than was anticipated by Hillesden—are now already acknowledged by that dignified spot as "quite married people." It was Mrs. Langley-Binks who had said that, and there had been a little

unpleasantness between her and Mrs. Berkeley over it. The latter, who is always troublesome, had asked her with a suspiciously innocent thirst for knowledge, when people might consider themselves *quite* married? A month was it, or a week? And was there really a time fixed for it by the Lord Chamberlain, who had to do with all our morals?

Mrs. Langley-Binks had contented herself by going into hysterics, and saying she was indecent, and it all blew over eventually. But it quite crowded out the election excitement at Hillesden whilst the quarrel lasted.

The Verschoyles, whose return had been looked forward to with much eagerness, proved disappointing. They were not shy and blushing, and mutually adoring, but terribly sedate from the very first. There had been no lovers' ecstasies at odd moments, no half-concealed (but perfectly seen) pretty meaning glances from one to the other. The dinner-parties had not proved too long for them, and there had not been a suspicion of their desiring to leave early the few balls given in their honour.

"A very sensible pair," said some up-to-date New Woman. "A most unloverlike pair," said Lady Maria, in her own old heart, that of late has begun to feel older, and very sad.

To-day she is giving an "at-home," "just to brighten up the people, dearest," she says to Mrs.

Verschoyle, who agrees with her that it will be a good thing, whilst knowing in her heart that Lady Maria is giving this party, and has given many others lately, solely with a view to studying Anthony and his wife when together. She has not had many opportunities during the past month of seeing her son, Anthony's visits to his mother being now very few and very uncertain. Is he afraid of having his secret read by those clever, loving old eyes?

He has come rather early to-day with Cecil, who seems in charming spirits, if one can forget the little touch of chill that has dropped into her air since her marriage. She is exquisitely, faultlessly dressed, and her hair is in the very latest fashion. She had always gowned herself well, but since her return she has shown herself positively extravagant over her frocks. Her trousseau—Lady Maria and Mrs. Verschoyle and the other privileged few had seen her trousseau, which was a vision of beauty—a trousseau not so many weeks old, has been discarded, and on several occasions, such as to-day, she has appeared in entirely fresh costumes; Anthony alone knows why.

"Straight from Worth," says Mrs. Berkeley, who perhaps, in wealthier days, knew, surveying her through her long glasses.

At all events, the young Mrs. Verschoyle is the admired of all beholders—if scarcely the Cecil they

had known before, very pale, very tall ("Has she grown?" asks Mrs. Langley-Binks), very beautiful, and very, very cold.

"What on earth has happened to her?" asks Mr. Browne of his one confidante—himself. Mr. Browne, like spring, has once again "come up this way." Last night he arrived at The Towers, causing a considerable skirmish there amongst the domestics, because of the fact that he had forgotten his luggage at the last junction—a disturbance only allayed by the arrival of a porter later on with all his goods and chattels on a truck—and getting a glimpse at things as they are at The Towers, he is now struggling, in his own wise way, to work out the situation. His hostess is indeed so changed, that the elucidation of the mystery grows enthralling. "Good heavens! perhaps somebody will marry me some day!" says Dicky, falling into melancholy. "And if I get changed as much as Cecil, what the deuce will be the end of me?" Visions of ropes hang before him.

Not only Dicky, but many of her old friends wonder vaguely at this change in her. Still, she is always delightful, to-day especially, speaking to this one and to that, with a careful sweetness that should have disarmed criticism; and, indeed, it is only now, when nearly all the guests are gone, and she is standing on the terrace outside Lady Maria's drawing-room, that she lets the strange, new, perplexing

look settle down once more upon her face—a face that used to be so noted for its gentleness, above and beyond all other pretty traits.

Anthony, in the grounds below, is still speeding his mother's departing guests, and Mr. Browne, who —with Jinnie, who is his shadow—is with her, marks how her eyes follow him.

"Awfully good-looking fellow, Anthony!" says he. "Got such a nice head. Takes breeding to show a head like that."

"Does it?" Her tone is indifferent.

"So I've heard, any way. But hearing is always a fraud. Still, I maintain that your husband, if not exactly handsome, could give many other fellows points——"

"Could he? His nose is a little too long, don't you think?"

"'Tis a very *nice* nose," says Jinnie suddenly, and with much force. "It"—with deplorable rudeness—"is twice as nice as yours!"

With this parting shaft she walks indignantly down the terrace, and at the end of it sits on an upturned flower-pot, and, from her expression, plainly gives herself up to thoughts entirely misogynistic.

"'Give me a man with a nose,'" quotes Dicky. "That's what the Duke of Wellington *didn't* say."

"I'm sure he did say it," says Carry, who has

just come up in time to hear the last sentence. "And if it's Tony's nose you're talking of, I like it. You do, too; don't you?"—to Cecil.

"If you ask me"—with a charming but supercilious smile—"I really don't."

"No?"

"No!"—still smiling.

Carry, who is often very dreadful, regards her with lowering brows.

"Well, I do," says she. "In fact, I can't see any fault in him at all."

"Ah!"

It is the faintest breath, but so full of meaning that both Mr. Browne and Carry instinctively glance at her. She is as calm as ever, and returns Carry's penetrating glance with one of amusement.

"Can you?" demands the terribly direct Carry.

"Dear Carry, *what* a question! Of *course* not," says Anthony's wife calmly.

She fixes her eyes on Carry, and the latter, still frowning, turns abruptly and goes away.

"It is difficult to please everybody," says Cecil, looking after her. "I have offended you because I do not admire Anthony's nose! I have offended Carry because I say I see no fault in him! I am unfortunate.

"Girls, as a rule, are fools," says Mr. Browne amiably. "We must try and forgive her; and you

can see for yourself that you rather riled her over Anthony. Girls go in for ecstasies, don't you know. They expect even married people to say out just what they think. But I understand——" He pauses, and looks straight at her. "Of course, *I* know you really think his nose adorable, and that he himself is not only one in a thousand, but the most delightful, the most honourable, man on earth."

He is watching her closely. She turns slowly until her eyes meet his, then she lowers her lids. Her lip curls, and an intense scorn betrays itself on every feature.

"Honourable!" says she.

For a moment there is silence. Then suddenly she turns to him, that strange, unhappy smile again upon her lips.

"Why do you praise him to me? Do you think I don't appreciate him sufficiently—that I don't know his worth? Oh"—with a touch of cruel irony—"I do, I assure you. Do you know"—laughing, a most imperfect laugh—"you remind me of the Athenians of old, who sang the praises of their uncertain heroes with a view to making them popular with the crowd. Has Anthony, in your opinion, sunk so low as that?"

"Look here, Cecil," says Dicky Browne, "I've known you a long time, haven't I? I may say a word to you, eh, without——"

"Oh, it is useless," says she quickly; "I have known that you saw——" She breaks off abruptly.

"I have seen only that you and Verschoyle are not very happy. I desire to see no more."

"There is no more to see"—coldly. "We are not happy; we never shall be until death releases one of us. I say this to you, Dicky, because I know what I say to you is sacred. I shall, however, say no more. And"—with a fresh touch of agitation—"do not try to help us. You—Heaven itself could not!"

"Of course, I don't know where the thorn lies," says Dicky; "but to think of you or Anthony being miserable all your days seems too much for me. There must be some solution of this mystery. . . . I don't want to know what it is, but I do want to think that happiness still lies before you."

"Happiness for *me?*" Her tone is now again quite low, and comparatively calm. "Don't hope for that. Happiness for me is over. My life is over. Hope is dead."

"Hope never dies," says Mr. Browne.

"No?" She smiles faintly. "Then Hope has gone to live with some more fortunate mortal; he no longer has his home with me. I tell you so much very frankly, because I cannot hide it. You have seen that we are not as—as"—stammering a little—

"other people are. But what I have said to you now I have said to no one else, and——"

She looks at him intently.

"I have forgotten every word you have said," says Dicky gravely.

At this moment someone inside the drawing-room calls out to Cecil to come in and have some tea.

"Some fresh tea, Cecil, now that all these tiresome people have gone," says Mrs. Verschoyle at the window. "Will you stay there or come in?"

"Come in," returns Cecil pleasantly, stepping lightly across the terrace and into the room.

Anthony is sitting next his mother, talking to her, and the latter notices that he does not cast so much as a glance at the cold, beautiful creature who is his wife, as she enters the room.

"Take some tea to Cecil, Jinnie dearest," says Mrs. Verschoyle, nodding and smiling at Cecil as she does so.

There has been a little lull in the conversation going on, so that Jinnie's answer rings out loud and clear.

"No, I won't!" says that criminal, in a prompt and awful tone.

"Jinnie!"—a low but dreadful protest from her mother.

"No, I won't—I won't ever—so there!" Jinnie is now wearing out the pattern on the carpet by a mad

tattoo with her revengeful little feet. "I hate her, I do! She said Tony's nose was too long."

Silence falls upon the room.

"Oh, nonsense, darling!" says Mrs. Verschoyle presently. Her laugh is very nervous. "What have you got in your head now?"

"She did!"—excitedly—"she did! I heard her; and I won't have anyone call Tony's nose ugly!"

Suddenly, like a little whirlwind, she rushes to Verschoyle, and, flinging her lanky arms around his neck, looks back with stormy eyes at Cecil, who has grown very pale.

Anthony makes a very handsome attempt at laughter.

"What a little partisan!" says he.

He draws Jinnie towards him very kindly, although he is conscious of a distinct pang caused by the child's words. Abject folly, he tells himself, yet not to be subdued. Plain he undoubtedly is; but, then, she need not have flaunted the fact that she thought so thus openly before their world. Fenton, of course, is considered handsome. Had her thoughts flown to him when she thus criticised her husband's looks? And how unlike her it all is!

His uncomfortable laughter dies away, and his face hardens. He bends it over Jinnie, who is still standing near him, an arm thrown round him, her

attitude a desperate defiance of the world that dares to calumniate her Tony.

"I have one defender, at all events," says he.

Involuntarily his eyes meet his wife's, who turns abruptly away. She had been watching him, and remorse, and some other feeling, is writ large upon her face. Is it self-contempt? With a sudden horror of herself, and as sudden a hatred of Jinnie, that she never afterwards quite gets over, she sinks gracefully into a chair close to the window, and waits on events.

"Oh, you have!" says Jinnie, who is a frightfully troublesome and mistaken little person, clinging even closer to him.

Verschoyle gently undoes her arms.

"But, you see, I scarcely need you," says he. "Your aunt has proved her preference for ugly people by doing me the honour to marry me."

Again he looks straight at Cecil, a little defiantly, perhaps; and she looks back at him very disdainfully, beyond all doubt.

"I think you are slightly in fault, Jinnie," says she, with a cold, calm smile. "I said, and now I regret it, that your uncle's nose was, I thought, a little too long—not ugly. I do not remember using that word."

She is so pale as she finishes this sentence that Mr. Browne makes a slight step towards her. But

in another moment she is herself again, and is laughingly putting by Mrs. Verschoyle's apologies for her little daughter's indiscreet speech.

The whole affair indeed, awkward as it is, is at an end; but, slight as it is, it leaves an uncomfortable impression behind it, and a silence with which no one seems capable of dealing except Dicky Browne, who at times is really invaluable. Seeing Jinnie once more going to assert herself, he takes the initiative, and plunges into the void before she can speak.

"Jane!" cries he in a loud and shocked tone, "come here!"

He has ensconced himself in the most magisterial of the chairs in the room, and is holding on his knee a book—a very delightful and charming book, that has afforded pleasure to many thousands of children—on which he has been hastily working with a pencil. It is a much-illustrated book, and the present holder of it is pointing to its cover with undisguised concern.

"Look at this," says he, tapping the book sternly. "Is it this sort of literature that Miss Sterling recommends to you?"

"That's 'Aunt Louisa's Book of Nursery Rhymes,'" says Jinnie, who really ought to have gone beyond such pleasing trivialities, but has not. At times she has fits of devotion for "The frog who would a-wooing go," and "The fox and his wife they had a great strife." She speaks with a little puzzled air.

"Look again, my dear child," says Dicky sadly, who has put a large C in pencil before the Rhymes. "Surely, surely, Jinnie, at your age you can read? Is that word Rhymes? To me it is Crhymes: 'Aunt Louisa's Book of Nursery Crhymes!' Alas! what pernicious reading for the young!"

"'Tisn't that," says Jinnie, "'tis Rhymes."

"Crhymes"—firmly. "And in my opinion Aunt Louisa is the biggest crime of all. Such a book to let loose in any nursery. I haven't looked inside; I was afraid. But, seriously, Jane, I think someone ought to speak to Aunt Louisa, don't you?"

"No, I don't"—violently. "She's lovely. And besides——"

"She doesn't spell lovely," says Mr. Browne. "I can't help feeling that the *h* and the *y* are too superfluous." He points them out to her.

"'Twas Rhymes always," says Jinnie.

"Was it?"—thoughtfully. "It isn't so now. Jane! will you compel me to believe you don't even know your *letters?* And such a big, big *C!* I shall have to speak to Miss Sterling, mildly, but firmly. She is not doing you justice."

"'Twas you put that *C* there," declares Jinnie, who is now regularly on the warpath.

"This is depravity," says Mr. Browne mournfully, "and arises, no doubt, from a constant perusal of 'Aunt Louisa's Nursery Crhymes.' I shall write to

her about her morals, and especially her spelling. However, my poor misguided child, as I have known you and loved you for so many years, I shall not betray your sad secret to the world just now. You shall be let off this time, to come up when called upon.

'Though lost to shame, to memory dear.'

Far be it from me, Jane, to send you to a lonely cell! As for Aunt Louisa——"

He rises.

"Where are you going?" asks Jinnie anxiously.

"To find the kitchen fire. Flames alone can purify Aunt Louisa's crimes."

"You shan't burn my book, you shan't!" cries Jinnie furiously. "Mammy, mammy!" calling to her mother in her distress, "he is going to burn Aunt Louisa!"

"No, Jane," says Mr. Browne austerely; "though I think she richly deserves it, I am not going to burn Aunt Louisa. Why should I? She was evidently born to be hanged. You should keep to the strict truth, my infant. Not Aunt Louisa, but her book, is to be consigned to the flames."

"Well, I won't let you, I won't!" cries Jinnie, hanging on to his arm like a little vampire.

"My dear Dicky, what are you doing now?" asks Mrs. Verschoyle, coming up to them.

"Looking after Jinnie's morals," says Mr. Browne with much dignity.

He had, however, created the diversion he desired.

## CHAPTER XXII.

"Mine eye also is dim by reason of sorrow."

LADY MARIA, who has worked away at her knitting with almost feverish energy for quite five minutes after they are gone, now lays down her arms. Her task, perhaps, had proved too much for her, gallant as her old soul is.

"The marriage has been a failure, Jane," says she, very simply and sadly, addressing Mrs. Verschoyle, who has lingered in the drawing-room after the departure of their guests, knowing the turmoil that is disturbing the sorrowful heart of Anthony's mother. At this she comes quietly to Lady Maria, and, kneeling down beside her, lays one hand with a half-embracing gesture round her.

"Yes, my dear—a failure," says Lady Maria. All her wonderful vivacity is gone. Indeed, her beautiful old hands, that had been a toast, or something equivalent to that, in the last generation, tremble so much that she has to put them and the beloved knitting into her lap.

"Oh, I can't, I won't believe it!" cries Mrs. Verschoyle, almost as much agitated. "Good heavens! what a happy thing it seemed—their marriage, I mean—and now . . . You remember, don't you, how Cecil before it looked so bright, so happy, so contented. You must remember, too, my saying to you that I thought she was much more in love with Tony than she herself knew?"

Lady Maria nods her head sadly.

"Did you notice," says she, "that whenever she addressed him—which was very seldom—she called him Anthony, not Tony! Anthony! and so coldly! Jane, some terrible thing has happened, to separate them—to destroy their young lives!"

She stops. To Mrs. Verschoyle's astonishment, a mist of tears dims the keen old eyes.

"Don't be so unhappy about it, dearest," whispers she, gently slipping both arms round her. "There may be a misunderstanding of some sort, and . . . I think there is . . . But it may come right in the end." She says it quite faithfully, but her tone has no hope in it, no life.

"To dwell upon that, Jane, is only to make one more miserable at the last," says Lady Maria, who has read her plainly. "I can see"—sorrowfully—"you think as I do. Jane"—suddenly—"come closer to me, my darling!"

She hesitates, as if uncertain how to go on, and

a wave of colour sweeps across Mrs. Verschoyle's face. Though she knows Lady Maria is devoted to her, expressions of affection are very rare with the older woman; and, indeed, she has always treated Mrs. Verschoyle more as a friend, a *bonne camarade,* than a daughter, until now, when the grief that is consuming her breaks down all barriers, and lays bare her soul and her real love for the wife of the son who had been beloved beyond all the world.

"Come closer, Jane!" Mrs. Verschoyle, who is really at her feet, drags her cushion nearer to her. "Have you noticed?" says Lady Maria, taking Mrs. Verschoyle's hand into her own trembling, feverish clasp. "Have you ever listened when she is speaking to him? . . . So coldly, dearest, as if—as if she hated him. Jane!" in a frightened tone, "what does it mean, my dear? Does she—does she hate him?"

"Oh, no, no!"—in great distress, the greater in that once or twice the same thought had come to herself. "How could she hate him? dear, kind fellow, darling Tony! Oh, impossible!"

"She does," says Lady Maria; the firm, rather authoritative voice sounds very feeble—very tired. "Oh, my poor boy, my pretty Tony! You didn't know him when he was a tiny creature, Jane, with his hair so soft and so curly. Not so handsome as George, ever—but very, very pretty, and so manly. God forgive me if I loved his brother better than I

loved him! If . . . I don't feel so sure about it now, Jane. Now, when I see that strange look upon his face, that dreadful pretence at gaiety, and his dear eyes so sad all the time . . . and his voice——"

"Mother dearest!" Mrs. Verschoyle's arms press her closer. "Do not think of it like that. There is a mistake of some sort, some miserable misunderstanding, but it will all come right some day. No one could hate Anthony—no one could fail to love him."

Lady Maria shakes her head.

"You are a good girl, Jane" (Mrs. Verschoyle will always be a girl to Lady Maria), "the best; but I . . . know! He is in terrible trouble! I see it, I feel it." Suddenly she begins to tremble. "I wouldn't mind anything, Jane, if he didn't try to *look* happy. Oh"—bursting all at once into the slow, painful tears of old age—"that horrible trying! it cuts to my very heart. What can I *do* for him, Jane?"

"You will be quite ill if you go on like this," says Mrs. Verschoyle tenderly, anxiously. "Now consider; you are only imagining all this. Matters cannot be so bad as you suppose. For one thing, to do Cecil justice, I don't think she would wilfully be unkind to——"

Lady Maria's tears cease on the spot. She sits up stiffly.

"Don't name that heartless creature to me!" says she, with cold anger. "I dare say, for Anthony's sake, I shall manage to be civil to her *openly*. But——"

The "but" is ominous.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

"Last year, a brief while since, an age ago,
A whole year past, with bud and bloom and snow,
O moon that wast in heaven, what friends were we!"

To-night The Towers is *en fête*. Anthony, in one of the few interviews he permits himself with his wife, had suggested the desirability of returning the hospitality that her neighbours had showered upon them since their return from their honeymoon, and Cecil, coldly, had told him she wondered why he had not thought of it before. He might have given a very efficient answer to that question, but he did not. Her coldness, her continued disdain, had, if she only knew it, left him dull to present duties.

But what should the return be? Even the most incessant list of dinner-parties did not seem equal to filling the void. "Give them a dance," suggested Amyot one day, when he was lunching with them. Oddly enough, Amyot is the one person in Hillesden

to whom Cecil has been almost her own self since her return, if one excepts Mr. Browne—and he in quite a different way—and she caught on at once to his suggestion. Yes, a dance it should be!

Anthony, coldly acquiescent, utterly indifferent to anything once the world's eyes are off him, had nodded his head at that luncheon; and all at once the thermometer runs up at Hillesden in the hearts of all the young men and maidens there.

The dance is established.

* * * * *

The beautiful old reception-rooms are to-night ablaze with roses. The heart of the summer has reached us now, and

"From the depths of the green garden-closes,
Where Summer in darkness dozes,
Till Autumn pluck from his hand
An hour-glass that holds not a sand;
From the maze that a flower-belt encloses
To the stones and sea-grass on the strand,
How red is the reign of the roses
Over the rose-crowned land!"

Roses, roses everywhere to-night in the old Towers, the greatness, the sweetness of them taking one captive at every turn. The gardeners had revolted a little at the onslaught on their flowers, but Cecil had had her own way, and the beautiful old house is filled all through with many-coloured roses, brought not only from the houses and grounds at

The Towers, but from those at her own home at Fairtown.

She has come down now, although it is early still. But, then, she has grown restless of late, and a little impatient. Lady Maria, who, with her party (as is her wont on big occasions at her son's house), had driven over in the afternoon to dine and dress here, is, however, before her, with Mrs. Verschoyle —*and* Jinnie, who had been specially asked by Anthony, to please his mother.

Cecil, advancing up the library slowly, indifferently, stops beneath a chandelier to pull up one of her long gloves. Beautiful always, she has surpassed herself to-night; yet she is very plainly dressed. A white satin gown (*not* her wedding-gown), and only one little string of pearls around her neck—the latter a gift from her father in her girlish days. Of all the costly gifts her husband had lavished on her before her marriage, not one is to be seen.

"She might at least have worn the tiara," thinks Mrs. Verschoyle bitterly; she knows that the entire county who will be assembled here to-night had either seen or heard of that beautiful diamond thing, and would be on the *qui vive* to see it.

Lady Maria, after a courteous but cold greeting of her son's wife, drops back again into a pretended interest in the book she holds. She, too, had noted the *meant* simplicity of Cecil's attire, the utter want

of ornament, save that one string of pearls, which, indeed, is almost priceless, but had not been given by the bridegroom. She has noted, too, with the eye of a connoisseur where beauty is concerned, that Cecil's haughty loveliness is sufficient for her, without any outside aid.

Jinnie, however, childlike—children are always slaves to beauty—has rushed up at once to Cecil, and, looking at her, breathes softly:

"Oh, you are nice to-night! You are!"

Anthony, coming in here, goes straight to where his mother is sitting beneath the huge coloured shade of one of the lamps.

"What a vision!" says he, in the usual light style he affects just now—a lightness so sadly belied by the heaviness that rests always on his eyes. He smiles at her as he says it; and, indeed, Lady Maria, in her magnificent gray brocade and her blaze of diamonds, is a charming picture that might well be called "Age defying Decay." "Jinnie, come here and admire your grandmother."

"I can't! I'm admiring *her,*" says Jinnie, pointing a lean little finger at Cecil. Jinnie has no manners, and, indeed, if one takes into consideration the shortness of her skirts to-night, very little clothes.

"Never mind," says Anthony, in a whisper to

his mother. "You have at least one *staunch* admirer." As he says this he stoops and kisses her.

Jinnie, as usual, sees everything.

"Why don't you kiss Cecil, too?" cries she. "She's just as lovely."

A sudden silence.

Cecil had turned crimson for a moment, but now is pale as death. Anthony alone preserves his calm.

"People do not, as a rule, kiss in public," says he with perfect unconcern. "I make your grandmother the exception."

Once again an angry red flames in Cecil's face "Oh, ready liar!" cries she to her own heart. "When do we kiss . . . in public or in private?" A great anguish crushes her heart, an anguish she cannot understand.

"They do," says Jinnie earnestly. "I saw Jones kiss Fanny to-day." (Fanny and Jones are servants in Anthony's home.)

"What is to be done with Fanny and Jones?" austerely demands Mr. Browne, who has strolled in from the conservatory, and has caught a glimpse of Cecil's face. "Such vulgarity ought to be checked." To Jinnie: "Are you certain of your assertion?"

"What's that?" asks Jinnie.

"No evasions"—sternly; "are you sure that you saw Esau kissing Ka——, that is, Fanny kissing Jones?"

"No, 'twas Jones," says Jinnie, with wide eyes.

"The same thing in the end," says Mr. Browne thoughtfully.

"Well, he did," says Jane defiantly. "I saw him, and he kissed her so funny-like, too, just like Fancy" —her canary—"kisses me."

"Chaste salute," says Mr. Browne. "I regret, however, Jane, to notice that you somewhat countenance the levity of Fanny and Jones. I put Fanny first, as I feel sure she is the principal culprit. Am I really to understand that you approve of kissing in public?"

"'Twas in the hall," says Jinnie vaguely.

"That is no answer, and silence gives consent. I shall therefore at once proceed to kiss you in public. For long I have awaited this moment."

He makes two tremendous ogre-like strides towards her, whereupon a skirmish ensues that threatens danger not only to life and limb, but to all the crockeryware and small tables in the room.

I am bound to confess Jinnie gets the best of it. She, as a rule, is too much for most people, and presently Mr. Browne brings his chase to a breathless close, seeing that Cecil's face is now quite calm again.

"The conservatories are charming," says he, stopping near Anthony. "They are well worth a glance before they are crowded. Come and look at

them. I think, however, one of the lamps is a little high. Perhaps"—glancing at Cecil—"your wife will come, too."

"Will you?" asks Anthony, glancing coldly at his wife over his shoulder.

"I think not, thank you," returns she. Her voice is politely contemptuous.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

"Life is a jest, and all things show it:
I thought so once, and now I know it."

THE dancing is well begun now, and, indeed, so far has the evening advanced that the dowagers and the papas (who are playing whist in a charming little room, comfortably far from the sound of the band) are beginning to dream of supper. It is the hour when gossip is rife amongst the non-dancers, and the elderly ladies are thawing towards each other, and growing confidential. After supper they will be much more so, but even now little priceless hints and innuendoes are passing from lip to lip.

The feature of the evening is Mrs. Berkeley, who has annexed a fresh victim. Nothing so smart as her Infantry Boy (who, indeed, had been sufficiently smart to get himself removed to some station far, far away from Hillesden), but solid. The new

man is the Anglo-Indian, Shine by name, stout by nature, and reported to be as rich as Crœsus.

He had seemed much attracted by Mrs. Berkeley's elderly young charms on the occasion of their first meeting, and indeed, according to Amyot, who has watched Mrs. Berkeley's progress from afar, no one else has been allowed so much as "a look in," ever since that memorable dinner-party. And, strange to say, in spite of all Mrs. Langley-Binks' efforts, and they have been leviathan, Mr. Shine has never wavered in his devotion to the widow since that night—"Mrs. B." as he now familiarly calls her, being very vulgar, poor man! But then, after all, he *isn't* a poor man. So Hillesden major refuses to call him vulgar, whilst Hillesden minor is discreetly silent. The man is well connected on one side, and really, as Lady Maria says, "if he will only marry Mrs. Berkeley, and take her away, a debt of gratitude will be due to him."

* * * * *

"Carry," says Amyot, who is dancing with Miss Desmond, "come out here." He draws her towards an open window where there are seats. "I've got something to tell you. I'm going to propose to that girl to-night, or"—tragically—"never!"

"What courage you have!" says Carry. "I—I had thought of saying, 'Yes' to Mr. Popkin to-night, but——"

"Oh, don't," says Ritchie. "He's such an ass."

"I must, however. Everyone wants me to do it. And he has come. I fancied"—with a heavy sigh—"being a big dance, you know, that he *wouldn't* come, but here he is."

"As large as life and as ugly as ever," says Richie, a little viciously.

"Oh, don't mind me," says she affectionately. "Tell me about yourself. So you are really going to propose to her to-night?"

"Yes"—sullenly. "I suppose so."

At this moment he lifts his eyes, and see Mrs. Langley-Binks swooping down upon him with all sails spread.

"Here is her mother. By Jove! I'm not equal to that. To be taken in tow by *her* is too much. Why can't she leave me alone?"

He looks round, as if for escape, and finds Dicky Browne at his shoulder. Now, Dicky is a born diplomatist, and Amyot, without a second's hesitation, flings himself upon his tender mercies.

"Look here, Dicky. Here's Mrs. Langley-Binks coming towards us. She wants me. But will you for a little while hold on to her?"

"My dear fellow, what a sensational request. Where am I to hold on? To what? However, *go*, I'll face the foe alone. But what am I to do?"

"*Scalp her,*" says Richie viciously.

"A hopeless job," says Mr. Browne. "And not to be done. You might as well dream of taking the breeks off a Highlander. Her hair is false. There, go. She's coming."

Whereon Richie flies.

With the courage of despair, Mr. Browne stands firm, and awaits the coming of Mrs. Langley-Binks with a truly noble fortitude.

"I've been watching you from afar," says she, in her own gay little way, and with a laugh that shakes the room. It is a long laugh, and gives her the opportunity of looking round her north, east and west for the vanished Amyot. "And you looked so solemn, so unlike your delightful self, so—haw! haw!—intense. As though this frivolity was a trouble to you —as if your thoughts were miles away!"

"Not quite so far as that," says Mr. Browne sweetly, a little bashfully indeed.

"And how far, then?" demands Mrs. Langley-Binks with an elephantine attempt at playfulness.

"Only in the next room," says Dicky, as if very nervously this time. "Your daughter, Mrs. Langley-Binks, I hear, is there."

"Did you hear so? Dear me!" says she. "But—— Haw, haw, haw!"

Again her dreadful laugh expands her lungs, and the people on the lawn outside stand and wonder

whether really all this late heat is going to lead to thunder.

"You're so funny always, Mr. Browne."

"Do you know, sometimes I think I am," says Dicky sadly.

At which Mrs. Langley-Binks gives way to another alarming burst of mirth, and goes on to the next group in search of Amyot.

"I should think the villagers in the next hamlet are 'sitting up' by this," says Mr. Browne in a dazed tone. "Seven-leagued boots I've heard of, but a seven-leagued laugh——"

"Belongs only to Mrs. Langley-Binks," put in Mrs. Berkeley at his elbow. "Have you heard the latest about her? She was discovered yesterday singeing her hair to make it grow. Her false hair! She had asked—well, I think I ought not to mention names, but she had asked some people to luncheon. And she was a little late, don't you know. And she sent for them to come up to her room—such pretty familiarity, you know. And there, as if by chance, they saw the singeing. Very clever, don't you think, eh? When I have to come to false hair" —she is covered with it—"I shan't call in my friends and neighbours to see it singed. Awful good story, however, eh? One doesn't often hear one as good as that, don't you think?"—turning to Mr. Shine, who seems convulsed with mirth.

"Come and have some cup," says he.

"This is getting too much for me," Mr. Browne murmurs sadly to himself. "I would I were in my little bed."

"Really, d'ye know, so do I," says Mr. Popkin at his elbow. "All these young ladies—you know, eh? a little too kind, don't you think? I—hee, hee! —have had such a run from them. I, too, I assure you, Mr. Browne, would be abed, where—hee, hee! —if I may without irreverence say so, 'The wicked cease from troubling, and the weary'—*I'm* the 'weary'"—with a fatuous smile—'are at rest!'"

Mr. Browne turns a thoughtful eye upon him.

"Why don't you go, then?" says he, alluding to the little bed.

"Ah, think how I should be missed!" says the curate, throwing his head pathetically on one side.

At this Mr. Browne turns tail and makes with all speed for an open door. It is bad to pound a man to a jelly in a friend's rooms!

## CHAPTER XXV.

"Neither sleep, nor bread, nor wine,
Seems pleasant to me; yea, no thing that is
Seems pleasant to me."

VERSCHOYLE has come straight across the ball-room to where his wife is standing.

"Will you dance this with me?" says he abruptly.

He hardly knows why he crossed the room, or why he is now asking her to dance with him. It was the impulse of a moment.

"I am very sorry"—she does not look at him—"but I'm afraid I am too tired. I have this moment refused Captain Fortescue."

"Not so much as a dance!" says he, with a mocking smile. "Yet, surely, during your short life-time you must have given a dance to even greater miscreants than I am—in your sight!"

His half-contemptuous air irritates her.

"It is difficult to understand you," says she coldly. "You have so many moods."

"I shall be plain, then. You prefer, perhaps, not to be seen with me."

"That may be counted among the absurdities, surely. As"—with an insolent droop of her white lids—"I have to be seen with you every day."

"You will give me this dance, then?"

His tone is utterly indifferent, and even subtly amused.

"Certainly not!"

"But why?"

"I have already told you—I am too tired."

"We need not dance it."

For a moment a frown settles on her forehead, and she pales.

"Why do you so insist?" asks she, a proud defiance in her eyes. "However, I shall sit it out with you, if—if"—scornfully—"you think publicity of this sort so necessary."

His lip curls.

"So far from that," returns he, his tone still half humorous—wholly indifferent, "I was going to suggest to you a turn or two in the gardens—you look pale and tired; the air may do you good—where no one can see us."

"In the gardens! Ah!" with a swift and eloquent glance behind her, where the many electric lights are turning night into day, and revealing the figures walking up and down. "That is where the real publicity lies."

There is something cynical, sarcastic, in her air.

It sits so ill upon her that Verschoyle casts a quick glance at her—at the pale, cold, disdainful, faultless face. Her eyes are downcast, and the long, dark lashes lie like shadows on her cheeks. How pale she is! Is it only a momentary pallor, or—— An awful fear shoots through his heart.

"Let us court it, then," says he quietly.

Outside, in the cool dry air, the rest may do her good. She looks as if she wanted rest—or is happiness, or hope?

She makes no reply.

The night is exquisite with moon and stars, that make the elaborate electric lights below look small and tawdry. Theatrical always, they look much more so now, with heaven's lights above them. It is a singularly bright night, and only here and there in little paths, quaintly hedged by evergreens on either side, dwells the darkness that should belong to night —the restful, the calm, the holy.

They have stopped now, far beyond the reach or hearing of the many animated couples who are making gay the walks beneath the electric lamps. Only the soft, sleeping lawn lies before them, sweet with its night's moisture. Cecil's eyes wander slowly over it, unseeing at first, but at last noting the little glistening drops that lie in the cups of the half-shut flowers, and that decorate each blade and stem.

It seems like an enchanted grove. The music

for the moment has ceased, and the voices of those behind her are too far away to disturb this miraculous silence, that seems to have caught and held the world. Time stands now, indeed, upon the borderland that divides night from day in these soft summer hours, when

> "The deep, dreamlike dew before the dawn
> Feels not the fingers of the sunlight yet
> Its silver web unweave."

A stray sad wave of thought, piercing like a word through the delicious drowsiness of her thoughts, wakes her to a full consciousness of the misery of the life she is leading—the life she will have to lead till Heaven's mercy brings her death.

She turns to Verschoyle.

"Why have you brought me here? What is to be gained by it, for you—or me?"

"I did not think of gain."

"You forget. It was for appearances' sake you brought me here; *that* was for gain—to prevent our neighbours talking. Oh, I put it plainly! But neither you nor I, should we try with all our wit, could prevent that. As for me"—she is trembling now, but her voice is resolute—"I am tired of it all. . . . The eternal, useless pretence . . . the stupid belief that we have hoodwinked everyone into regarding us as a model couple . . . loving and beloved——" She breaks off shortly, tightening each hand upon

her gown until the storm be past. And she does conquer, but the victory leaves her very white and cold. "I am tired of it," says she again, in a low voice. "The task has proved too much for me. I can pretend no more!"

"You mean——"

If *her* face is white, his is ghastly. She hesitates; then all at once bursts out:

"Oh, let me go away—anywhere—*anywhere* where I cannot see you! This is killing me—the deceit of it—the perpetual strain!"

"Anywhere where I cannot see you!" The words seem to repeat themselves in a thousand numbers, as though some distant bell were sounding them upon his brain. The brain—poor buffer!—reels a little, then recovers.

"For your sake," says he coldly, "I shall not consent to that until you have had full time to consider the consequences of the act you propose. The deceit, as you call it, and the strain are bad enough; but the position of a woman separated from her husband, you will find, is far worse—as society now goes."

"I care nothing"—proudly—"about society!"

"Not at this moment." He cannot altogether repress the bitterness of his spirit as he speaks. "But you are only twenty-one, and life is unkind; it gives one a possible threescore years and ten. And"—

all at once his eyes grow stern—"if you decide on leaving me now—well, go! But, remember, I shall never willingly look upon your face again. Should you repent your decision, don't"—with a cold smile —"come to me for help; all the remainder of your seventy years would not avail you to get my forgiveness."

She turns upon him.

"How dare you," says she in a low tone, but with terrible intensity, "speak to *me* as if *I* were to be the pardoned one? You—you——" Agitation checks her for the moment. "If you have forgotten, you must be mad!"

"I forget nothing," says he abruptly—"especially where you are concerned."

"Oh, as for me!" contemptuously.

"Cecil!" Suddenly he catches her arms, and so holds her, a miserable, angry light within his eyes. "I have told you a great deal——"

"You"—with idomitable courage, though her heart in reality is sinking within her—"have *confessed* a good deal."

"Well, so be it. I have at least told you—that——"

She interrupts him eagerly, almost wildly.

"That there was a reason for your suppression of that letter. Ah!"—with a suffocating little sob, that might mean triumph, or almost insupportable

joy, or, indeed, anything—"you are going to give it to me at last?"

She bends forward. Her soft eyes seem on fire in the moonlight. She stands, a little shrinking, a little wondering, her hands apart. Is he going to tell her?

"The reason still remains," says he in a low voice. He feels choking.

"You mean—you will not tell me?"

"I cannot."

She steps baek, and breaks into a strange, cruel little laugh.

"And you—expect me to believe *that*—that some splendid cause compelled you to suppress that letter?"

"Certainly I do. To me, at all events"—his voice grows very weary—"it seemed a splendid cause," he says.

Something in his manner moves her. She comes nearer to him.

"You have got the letter Sidney wrote to me," says she coldly, but very gently, in the tone of one who is ready to give an enemy a last chance. "I —I have not asked you for it before, because—because the contents were so useless, perhaps . . . or perhaps for some other reason. Will you give it to me? Surely you ought; it is mine—not yours. And —I should like to have it."

She had hesitated at the "and." Up to that she seemed only eager to gratify a certain curiosity. But to Verschoyle the hesitation at the last savoured of a lingering, nay, a still overpowering, desire for Sidney Fenton.

"I am sorry I cannot gratify you," says he icily. "It is no longer in my possession."

"You—you——"

"I burned it"—concisely.

"Burned it?"

"I have said so"—with a shrug. "I thought the fire was the best place for it. Fire is very purifying, you know."

"Burned it!" She repeats the words again, and her face grows haggard.

"You are more clever than I ever dreamt you," says she in a slow, strange tone. "What is it the lawyer people say—the people in the papers?—'You have destroyed the evidence of your crime'! It was very wise, very clever! But not"—with ineffable disdain—"very convincing!"

"I can quite see that my burning of Fenton's letter is to you fresh evidence of my depravity. I am quite aware, too, that you would believe anything against me—anything for *him!* As for that letter, the burning of it I consider no crime."

He has drawn himself up to his full height, as if in defiance of her.

"But why? Why? How can you defend yourself?"

Her contemptuous mood of a moment ago has deserted her. She is confronting him with anger, even rage, in her eyes—*and hope.*

"I do not seek to defend myself," says Verschoyle immovably. "It would be folly, with judge and jury and all against me."

"You mean by that"—unsteadily—"that I am not giving you a fair hearing?"

"*That* you never gave me."

"You mean it, then?"

He is silent.

"You say nothing!" cries she in an anguished tone.

"I shall never say anything!" says Verschoyle, with such a sudden burst of fury that, though not, perhaps, altogether losing her courage, she still shrinks away from him.

When she looks up, he is gone; and, somehow, with his going goes, too, all persistence in the thought of a separation from him.

No; it is impossible. She must live her life out as it is. Oh, dear Heaven! if he could only prove himself worthy—free from sin and dishonourable stain! But that—that hope is dead.

Well, in spite of all she has said to him, she will stay—stay always. And perhaps—who knows?

—the waiting may not be too long: Death may come—the kind, the unkind, Death.

Kind it would be to her, at all events. The thoughts of some old writer rush to her mind as she stands on the confines of the dewy lawn, with all the stars above shining down upon her: "We know nothing whatever about death for certain, save that it puts an end to the sorrows of life."

## CHAPTER XXVI.

"And no man sees
Beyond the gods and fate."

THE supper dances are hardly yet at an end, and in the supper-room many people are still lingering. Here, indeed, the maiden ladies of too terribly certain age are congregated in small batches, discussing the latest scandal, and suggesting broadly scandals still to come.

"And all unmarried," says Mr. Browne severely, regarding them with distinct disapproval, and from a safe distance. "And no chaperons, I'm told! Very improper, in my opinion. Fancy marriageable old girls like that being let out alone! I shall speak to Cecil."

He goes off, presumably to argue with Cecil upon the points of decency and decorum; but, wandering here and there, coming sometimes into shadowed corners and behind screens, creates immense discomfort.

"I've flushed more coveys to-night," says he to one of his innumerable friends, "than I've ever done in November."

One pair, at all events, he refrains from disturbing. Amyot and Carry, sitting *tête-à-tête* on the top step of the staircase, are looking so gloomy, so altogether unworthy of Mr. Browne's attentions, that he leaves them in peace.

In the meantime the "fascinating old girls" in the supper-room are having a rare good time. As has been said, everyone is on the *qui vive* to know whether or not Mrs. Berkeley will bring her open designs on the Anglo-Indian to a successful termination. But now, as the pair in question enter the supper-room, all the old eyes grow keen and all the old ears alert. "What's he saying, my dear?"

They all bend forward, but the voices at the end of the table are still low. They are wary hunters, however, and so they wait—to find their reward presently.

Mrs. Berkeley, at a prolonged whisper from the infatuated Mr. Shine, as if overcome by what he is saying, loses herself a little, and lets her delight express itself in a raised utterance:

"Oh, Samuel! You are a perfect darling!"

That settles the question at once and for ever. They are *engaged!* The old girls fall back upon their chairs.

"She's done it!"

"And diamonds, if anything! She'd never call him 'darling' under diamonds!"

"She's caught him. Poor dear man!"

And so she has. For once the old girls—and gossip—are right.

* * * * *

On the top step of the stairs Carry and Amyot are still seated. Their faces, as has been hinted, are downcast.

"So," says Carry, bringing to an end an exhaustive and plainly disappointing examination, "you did not propose to her?"

Richie is silent for a moment.

"No"—at last—"I didn't. Couldn't you see that? I"—gloomily—"would rather murder her than marry her."

"Oh, Richie!"

"Yes, I would"—vehemently. "'Pon my soul I would! Sometimes—often, of late—I can hardly keep my hands off her." His excitement dies suddenly away. "Look here, Carry: I'm off to California at once."

"Oh no!"

"Yes, I am. I mean it. There's nothing to be done here. The old place is up to its neck; it"—here the poor lad chokes a little—"must go! But I can't stay here, Carry, to see it go—to see it in another's possession. It has been ours . . . so long."

"But, Richie dear——"

"No, don't try to stop me. I shall leave here to-morrow."

"To-morrow?" Her voice has lost its usual wonderful strength, her face stiffens. "To-morrow!"

"Yes. The sooner I go, the better. What's the good of staying here, eating my heart out over each stick and stone I have loved all my life? Don't try to keep me back. You are the only real chum I have in the world, Carry, so you ought to be the one to help me forward, to give me"—with a long-drawn breath—"some sort of heart about it. Look here: I can't say good-bye to—to all my old friends."

She turns upon him, pale, indignant.

"Then, is it here . . . like this . . . you are going to say good-bye to *me?*"

"No, no. I was coming to that. To you I *must* say good-bye." He looks miserably round him, shaking his head, as if to keep down the rebellious tears that are rising to his eyes. "Oh, Carry! Isn't it all beastly hard? I wish—it is selfish, I know—but I can't help wishing you were ruined, too, and had to go to California."

"Well, do you know, I'm not sure I'd choose California," says Carry thoughtfully. "Of course, I mean if I alone were ruined, and you were not going there. Cowboys, I've always said, are horrid; and I'm sure there are cowboys in California. Australia,

now! There's a big field there, isn't there? And gold-mines, and things?"

"No; I'll go to California," says Richie dejectedly. "One place is as good as another, after this. This is home, you see, and all the rest of the world is a hotel."

Silence falls upon them for a little while, and then:

"Will you meet me to-morrow, about five—I shan't go till the eight train—up at the old stream, where the Droon turns its elbow? Where——"

His grief at last gains the mastery over him. Oh, dear Droon! oh, good Droon! that has yielded him so many a fair half-pounder! He turns aside, and stamps angrily upon the step beneath him, as if by this outburst of wrath against his honest emotion he hopes to recover himself.

Carry tries to say something, but fails. No thoughts come to her. Her tongue seems tied. Richie going—Richie! Her best, her dearest friend. Nay, is he not her only real friend, as she is his?

"You'll be there?" says he at last, without looking at her.

"Yes." Her voice is very husky.

Rising, the two forlorn ones descend the stairs—Richie to go straight to his beloved home, now all but lost to him.

---

## CHAPTER XXVII.

"There is no woman living that draws breath
So sad as I, though all things sadden her."

MR. BROWNE has sauntered out for a morning walk, finding the day pleasant. Down by the river is his usual run, the river, like the day, being pleasant to him.

And as he goes he meditates on his next visit. It will begin to-morrow, and will land him in Hertfordshire, and he is wondering vaguely who the Stainworths have asked to meet him. He has already reached the river, and is far into the little wood on its left, before he comes to the conclusion that Mrs. Stainworth won't ask Evelyn Morne. There had been a little too much of him and Evelyn last time —too many corners, and too much of the old screen business. Yet Evelyn had been a nice girl, too. . . .

He breaks off suddenly in his sentimental dreamings. To his astonishment, he can see, there below him in the wood, a figure seated—a woman with something about her, even at this distance, familiar to him. She is sitting on a fallen length of timber, and surely, surely, he tells himself as he draws

nearer, it is Miss Royce. There is hesitation, however, in his decision. But a desire to know that is inborn in Dicky—a sense that foolish people might call curiosity—urges him to the front. But even as he hesitates, making up his mind as to whether it is or is not Miss Royce, the figure turns her head towards him, sees him, and, rising, makes an effort to escape; but Mr. Browne, running forward, prevents this. It goes to his heart—though he always says he hasn't one—that she should regard herself as an outlaw.

"I say, Miss Royce"—coming up with her—"you remember me, don't you?" He takes her hand in spite of her, and shakes it warmly.

"Mr. Browne," says she faintly. "Yes, I remember you."

The terrible sadness of her face, the extreme depression that seems to hang round her, make Dicky very uncomfortable.

"I'm glad of that," says he kindly. "But"—he stops, touched by the shamed fear in the girl's eyes—"you don't look well," says he. "Not very fit, don't you know."

"That's a mistake," says she. "I am well . . . in body. In mind I am distressed. Mr. Browne, I think—I know I can trust you. Will you answer me one question? Is it true that Mr. Verschoyle and his wife are unhappy?"

Dicky hesitates. It is certainly a large order. To betray Cecil's relations towards her husband is one thing, yet to let those unhappy relations continue, for the sake of a word or two, seems abominable—nay, more, criminal. To keep silence now may mean condemning Cecil to a lifelong unhappiness.

Dick temporises.

"Who has told you that?" asks he.

"You must not ask me. I have heard it. That Mr. Verschoyle was unhappy was sufficient to bring me down here to-day. *Is* he unhappy?"

"They are both unhappy," says Dicky slowly.

"She, too! I thought her too cold."

"Mrs. Verschoyle?"

"Yes. I am sorry about her, as you tell me she is not as happy as she might be. But that is her own affair. She went here and there"—with a marvellously expressive movement of her thin shoulders. "Women who love this one, and marry the other, are never to be really pitied. Still, she was kind to me always, and I was often very rude to her, and so we are quits"—with something of her old vehemence.

Her extraordinary reasoning is too much for Dicky, who wisely leaves it alone.

"But it is not of her I wish to speak," says Miss Royce presently; "but of—her husband. Once—

though you never heard of it, I think—he was very good to me. *Good!*"—the low, subdued voice now finds passion in it—"oh, it is too poor a word!"

"And now you want to be good to him—is that it?" asks Mr. Browne lightly. "That's very good of you, too. But how?"

"There is something—something that he knows, but that"—clenching her hands in a painful sort of way—"his wife does not."

"Well?"

Dicky's face grows earnest.

"I might tell it to her—for his sake. Do you see? And yet——"

She grows silent, then, after a full minute, turns her strange, dark, glowing eyes full on Dicky.

"Sidney Fenton has something to do with it," says she.

Mr. Browne, for once in his life, acknowledges himself taken aback. Does this little nomad believe that Cecil still harbours tender thoughts of Fenton? And then all at once the reaction sets in, and Dicky grows uncertain. He sticks to his colours, however.

"Fenton!" says he. "You are surely mistaken there." He stops a moment to look at her. Is she thoroughly base? Is this a step by which she hopes to extract money from Anthony or Cecil? Is she one of the modern blackmailers? He goes on: "I

always understood, however"—deliberately—"that Sidney Fenton had something to do with you."

It is brutal, and he hates himself as the words pass his lips; but Anthony, as has been already said, is very dear to him, and—and justice is on his side, certainly! He pulls himself together.

"You are right," says Miss Royce in a low, crushed little way; whereupon Dicky, who had been trying to keep up his spirits and applaud his line of argument a moment ago, now falls to the lowest depths of self-abasement.

"But that is all over," goes on Miss Royce. "He is a traitor."

'Fenton?"

"Don't mention his name!" cries she fiercely; "I hate to hear it. Yes"—violently—"traitor—brute he has been to me! Oh!"—wildly, clenching her right hand, as one might who is in the act to strike—"if—if he was here now!"

"I'm sincerely glad he isn't," says Mr. Browne in his usual equable tone; "and so will you be, a little later on."

"What do you know?" demands she fiercely.

"Not so much, I acknowledge," says Mr. Browne amiably. "But you will permit me, at all events, to say that I should prefer your doing it when I am out of the way."

Of this pleasantry Miss Royce takes no heed.

"Tell me," says she eagerly. "This trouble of Mr. Verschoyle's . . . it arises out of a letter written by Sidney to Miss Fairfax—she was Miss Fairfax then, you understand."

"I don't, indeed," says Mr. Browne.

"The letter"—stamping impatiently upon the ground—"that Sidney wrote to Mrs. Verschoyle, and that Mr. Verschoyle destroyed."

"I am entirely ignorant, I assure you," says Mr. Browne, "and"—anxiously—"I desire to remain so. I know nothing—nothing, really, and I don't want to know." He is now thoroughly alarmed. Good heavens! To feel sure Cecil and poor old Tony are unhappy is bad enough, and to try to set them right is conscientious; but to have secrets told! "I must beg you will tell me nothing," says he emphatically.

"But——"

"It is impossible that I should listen! Don't waste your confidences on the barren air."

She sighs.

"No one ever will listen to me," murmurs she plaintively.

Her air is so seductive that Mr. Browne promptly stops his ears with his fingers.

"There, there," says she in a final way, putting up her hands, whereupon his come down. "Still, if only you would hear me!"

Up go his fingers again.

"Ah, no!" She motions to him again. "I'll say nothing, but that there was a letter, and that it was my fault that it was destroyed—if destroyed it was. There was no fault in Mr. Verschoyle. He acted well—altogether well—for everyone but himself." She looks at him, and, as if after a moment's inward thought deciding that he, and he alone, can tell the truth hereafter, goes on so hurriedly, speaking so rapidly, that Dicky himself, who is by no means a dullard, cannot prevent the flow of her words.

"It was a letter from Sidney to Miss Fairfax, asking her to marry him. He gave it to Mr. Verschoyle to deliver; but I, who heard all on the veranda outside, did my best to compel Mr. Verschoyle to suppress it. I never knew whether he *did* keep it back, but—I suppose he did, and I honour him for his breach of honour; and, besides, he gave me his oath not to——"

"Oh, come, I say! that's telling," says Mr. Browne, who is looking very red and confused. "I didn't want to know, you know."

"Yes, I know"—dejectedly—"but I can't help it. I must tell someone, and you—you who are a friend of his, can make it clear."

"In for a penny, in for a pound," says Dicky with a groan. "If I've got to help in this *galère,* you must make it clear to me. Presuming it was

the letter that—er—made the Verschoyles uncomfortable, how did Mrs. Verschoyle hear about it?"

"Sidney told her."

Dicky's face changes from its usual undisturbed urbanity to a very blackness of darkness.

"What a hound!" says he.

If he had trusted for sympathy from the slim, dark creature before him, so sad with her wrongs, he is mistaken.

"He is *not* a hound!" cries she furiously, all her small, dark, vivid face ablaze with rage. "No one shall call him so in my presence." She throws up her head with a little haughty gesture, and he can see beneath the anger in her eyes an undying love for her betrayer. "He spoke of the letter to her, not knowing she was married to Mr. Verschoyle. He told me all about it—he himself. And I tell you this—hound as you call him—he would have bitten his tongue out before he would have done Mr. Verschoyle such an injury. He is *not* a hound! How dare you speak of him like that?"

"You see, you hadn't explained," says Dicky gently. The loyalty, the devotion, of this forsaken girl to the man she loves, in spite of all his baseness, makes him sick at heart. "I am glad he told you. When was it?"

"Only lately—when chance brought us together once again. I"—bitterly—"had arranged the chance.

I shall follow him to his life's end—or mine! When he spoke to me of his meeting with . . . *her,* I thought of Mr. Verschoyle's kindness to me, and I came here to-day to see if I could not do something to—to give him a happiness that I shall never know myself." She sighs heavily. "Mr. Browne, could I see Mr. Verschoyle?"

"Why, of course!" says Dicky eagerly. "Come back to the house with me, and——"

"Oh no! Not that. I could not go into her house—I *could* not! Besides"—cowering—"I might meet some of the others—Lady Maria—Jinnie."

"Jinnie met you once, I think."

"She fancied so. Let her believe it a fancy, if she can. But she is a strange child. So, then, as I cannot go with you to the house, could you not arrange that I should meet him—say here?"

"I'm afraid not," says Browne, who sees breakers ahead, should anyone witness the meeting. "But look here! Why not see Mrs. Verschoyle?"

"See *her!*"—recoiling.

"Why not? What injury has she done *you?*" He accompanies his emphasis by a swift but meaning glance. "After all, she couldn't have cared much for Fenton, could she? as she married Verschoyle. And I assure you, if you want to do a good turn to Verschoyle, you had better do it through his wife. Come, now! I can arrange for her, if you like; see

her, and tell her all about it. It's the best thing you can do for Verschoyle—and you do owe him something, don't you?"

"A great deal"—faintly. "But—to meet her face to face—she who always was so far above me—to meet her now!"

There is terrible anguish in the dark, unfathomable eyes. Heaven alone knows how deep, how cruel it is.

"I think you have mistaken Mrs. Verschoyle a little all through," says Dicky earnestly. "She has a beautiful nature; you may safely trust yourself to her. I advise you to meet her, not Verschoyle, and tell her all. You see, the injury you have done Verschoyle touches her even more than him."

"That"—coldly—"I think little of."

"But you do think of Verschoyle," says Dicky promptly.

He stands silent, waiting for her answer, in a mortal fright, if the truth be known, lest his last allusion to Cecil should have spoiled all his plan.

"Does Mrs. Verschoyle ever walk down here?" asks Miss Royce presently, in a low and sullen tone.

"Not often. But if you wish to meet her here, I think I———"

"Where, then"—peremptorily, waving off the end of his sentence—"does she usually walk?"

"Sometimes in the Fir Wood above you, but only now and then. However, I——"

Again Miss Royce, now haughtily, puts aside his offers of assistance, which are all, she well knows, meant for the good of Cecil.

"I shall be in the Fir Wood to-morrow at six o'clock," says she. "Near the old tree that was struck by lightning."

She turns away abruptly, a frown on her brow, despair in her beautiful eyes. Dicky, sorry to the core of his somewhat flighty heart, because of her thus going, is making up his mind to run after her, and say something kindly that as yet has not been formulated in his brain, when she turns.

She stands irresolute beneath the trees a moment, a little sad, forlorn figure, with her eyes full of tears, and then she calls to him:

"Oh! I have been bad to you. You, who have been so good to me! Don't"—pathetically—"mind me. I—I am very grateful to you, though I suppose you will never believe it."

She makes a gesture, a heart-broken one, that forbids him to approach, and presently she has passed under the branching trees, and out of his sight for ever.

"Oh, that Fenton! What a damned brute! A damned brute!" says Dicky furiously; his eyes, too, are full of tears.

He turns and trudges back to The Towers, arranging on his way many things.

And, indeed, when he leaves in the morning, it is with the knowledge that the day must bring forth something, be it weal or woe, for the friends he loves so well, Cecil and her husband. He has laid the train; it remains with the others to light the match. He would, it must be confessed, have dearly liked to stay and see the result of the explosion, but though he knows he would be heartily welcome, that both Cecil and Anthony are sorry for his going, still, if "the result" should be reconciliation, he feels he will be well out of the way. "Three is trumpery," says a good old proverb. And, besides, Evelyn *may* be staying with the Stainworths.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

"One phrase was all his pleading,
He spoke of love and home:
To her who gave him heeding
He sang his question, 'Come.'"

Up here, near the lovely Droon, flowing so placidly on its way to the ocean—its mother—the evening is a very dream of beauty. Soft clouds there, and little lilac ones here, and far, far beyond, a touch of crimson.

No touch of life save the soft buzzing of

"A tired honey-heavy bee,
Gilt with sweet dust from gold-grained anthers,"

that comes to one on every side.

Carry, having reached a point near to that elbow of the Droon where Richie had directed her to meet him, sits down on a kindly boulder, and, finding herself in such sweet, sad solitude, takes her face into her hands.

"He is going! He is going!" Her cry is quite silent, but it is from her heart. Her only friend is going!

For a long time she sits thus, grieving sadly. Then she lifts her head. Time is dragging.

"How late he is!" thinks she, a little resentfully, perhaps; and then she grows ashamed of the reproach she has cast on him. "Oh no! of course it would be *stupid* to expect him to come quite in time. With all his packing and——" She stops her thoughts, and, grabbing at a little hazel twig, pulls and pulls at it, until her emotion is conquered.

He has so much to do—preparing for his last journey. Oh, how will it be with him in California! Oh, if only she might have gone with him!

Her face is very white and tired; the lids of her eyes tell of a sleepless night. Her *only* friend is leaving her! What shall she do without him—without Richie?

Any way, she will never have another friend—never! This she is swearing to herself, when a slight noise behind her makes her turn quickly, eagerly. Ah, here at last! Here is——

She finds herself face to face with Mr. Popkin!

It seems the last straw. To talk to *him!* To have to listen to him—now—when Richie is going away in a few hours for ever! Nay, worse! When Richie may come at any moment—and with very little time to spare—to say his last good-bye to her—to say his last words!

"Dear me! dear me!" says Mr. Popkin, with his pretty simper. "What a charmin' surprise! If I

had known *you*"—tenderly—"were here, I should have come up a little earlier. All alone, dear Miss Carry?"

"Quite alone, Mr. Popkin"—her grave young face now severe. "I came here because I *wished* to be alone."

"Ah, sweet thoughts, sweet thoughts, no doubt!" says Mr. Popkin ecstatically. "May I hope, Miss Carry——*May* I drop the Miss? Dare I hope—*Carry!*"—this comes like an explosion—"that you gave me *one* of them?"

"The only person who calls me 'Miss Carry' is our servant," says she, with subdued wrath, "and I wish her to be the only one. As for 'Carry'—to call me that seems——" She stops as if suffocating. Her thoughts have flown to Richie. Oh, how long he is in coming! "Only my friends call me that," says she, in a low tone. "To the rest"—nervously —"I am Miss Desmond."

He mistakes her agitation. It conveys to him, indeed, the fond hope that *his* presence has caused it.

"Your friends!" breathes he fondly. "But your lover, your faithful lover! You know who *he* is, dearest Carry! Would you have me seek a sweeter, a more familiar title still? Carita savours too much, perhaps, of the unstable Italian; but Car! How would that be, now? *Car!*" He spreads his black-gloved hands abroad as if in admiration of his last

idea. "Car," turning to her with the black-gloved hands now decidedly on the way towards her, "*charmin'* Car!"

Poor Carry! Who can blame her if, with her heart sore and miserable for the coming loss of her friend, she loses her temper entirely at this outrageous desecration of her decent name?

She rises to her feet and strides up to him—a bigger, a stronger young woman in her honest rage than she, as yet, has ever been.

"Look here," says she: "say one more word of that sort—*one*, mind, only one!—and I'll pitch you head foremost into the Droon!"

She looks so fierce, so entirely capable of fulfilling her threat, that the curate retires a yard or two.

"Surely—surely you are makin' a mistake," says he, still fatuously believing in his own conquering powers. "I love you, dear Miss Carry; I would gladly make you my wife, though I don't disguise from you there are others who——"

"Go to them!" says Carry, following him along the path. He is now moving backwards slowly, terrified by her angry eyes, and the extremely suggestive movements of her impatient young hands. "Go to them as soon as you can. If you lived a thousand years I should still think you, as I do now, the hatefullest man on earth. How *dare* you bother

me with your proposals? I don't *want* you. I wouldn't marry you if you were the last man on earth. Oh, go away! Go away! I can't bear to look at you."

And, indeed, Mr. Popkin at this moment is not a pleasant object for the eye to rest upon. His jaw has fallen, his eyes are protruding; he looks distinctly crushed.

He gathers himself together presently, and in a distinctly dishevelled condition beats a retreat.

"Astonishin', most astonishin'!" he mumbles to himself, as he disappears round the corner.

Carry—still standing, still with her fell eyes upon him—has barely time to see he is indeed gone, when over a boulder on her right Richie bursts into view, his face bright with excitement.

"Oh, Richie, you! You have come at last! How long you have been! I thought you would never come!"

She runs to him.

"Why, what's the matter?" asks he, surprised.

"Oh, nothing. That is, not *much!* Only Mr. Popkin came up here and found me, and—*you* know—he is always making love to me."

"Oh, confound him!" says Richie, storming; "isn't even our old fishing-place here sacred from him? And you—*you,* Carry!—you perhaps said——"

"I said I'd throw him into the Droon," says

Carry, in a boyish, shamefaced way, turning her head aside. "I'm afraid I was awfully rude, but that's the last I shall see of *him*, any way—as a lover, I mean." The word "last" seems to have wakened in her a remembrance of what the present moment means. "Oh, Richie!" cries she brokenly, "I shall soon see the last of you, too."

"No, no!" says he eagerly. "Carry, I have the strangest thing to tell you. It's—it's an awfully sad story, but—I must be a brute, I think—but I can't *feel* sad. I didn't know them, any way, but when one's cousin and children are drowned——"

"Richie, what are you saying? *Who* is drowned? What cousin?"

"Oh, you know—Lord Amyot of Amyot. He was only a second cousin, but he is dead, and his two little boys—drowned. Oh, I *am* a brute! But—but I'm the next heir, and—and I shall be able to keep on the old home now, and I shan't have to go away from this."

He lays his head upon her knees, his face hidden against her gown.

"You——"

She tries to find words, but none come. To her horror, she finds she is sorry for his news. As Amyot of Amyot, he will be much farther from her than if he went as a poor lad without a penny to the Antipodes. He had been sitting at her feet, and

when she feels his head upon her knees, she pats it softly, yet with a most forlorn despair within her heart. She can feel the short, dry sobs of shame and joy mingled that are shaking him.

"I'd have come up sooner," says he at last, in a stifled tone. "But when the letter came, and after that a telegram, telling me to go up to town at once to the solicitors' place to make arrangements about my being at the—their funeral. . . . Oh, Carry! the world is awful, isn't it? But—but I can't help feeling glad about the old place."

"You'll be a great man now, Richie," says she slowly. She is still patting his head, but her eyes are resting on the flowing river. "No more Droon days now, I think. You are a lord, and a very great man."

"That's what frightens me," says he, sitting up, but still tightly holding her hand. "I—I shan't know how to do it. I'm not used to it, you see. *You'll* have to help me, Carry."

"I!"—scornfully. "Do you suppose *I* have been used to it, as you say?"

"I don't care. You'll *have* to help me. We've been in the same boat for a long time—as poor as ever we could be—and now it shall float us ashore together. Look here, Carry"—he gets on his feet and drags her up beside him—"you'll marry me, won't you? I never knew it was *you* I wanted all

along, until that letter came this morning. The moment I grasped the truth—and it took a long time, I can tell you—I said to myself, *Now* Carry and I are all right, and she can have as much money as ever she likes. *That's* the way it came home to me. It's all right, isn't it, Carry?"

"It is *indeed,*" says Carry tearfully, joyfully; after which it only takes them a second to be in each other's arms, and to give and take a happy hug.

"It's a queer world," says he later on. "They used to call me 'Poor Richard,' you remember? And now I am poor no longer." Perhaps the phrase had been a little bitter to him.

"Never mind, *I* didn't call you that. I called you only my friend," says Carry.

"And yet," says he reproachfully, when they are sitting hand in hand upon a rock, "you would have given me up to the tender mercies of that conf——— that girl!"

"Did I?"—as if trying to remember. "But then I knew you wouldn't. I did, really! That—I didn't know it *then*—but that, I'm sure, is why I encouraged you. If ever you *had* meant it, I should have———"

"Well?"

"Killed somebody!" says she. "*You* for choice."

"Quite as well," says he. "And it would have economised time, for I should certainly have killed myself later on."

"You have given me a very fine scolding," says Carry, turning upon him. "But how about all your eloquent defence of Mr. Popkin?"

"Pshaw! As if a girl like you would ever marry such a fool as that!" Which settles the question.

"Richie"—presently—"I want to tell auntie. Come home."

"And I want to tell my side of the house. You go home and tell your auntie—*my* auntie now"—with an affection that goes to the girl's heart—"and I'll go and tell Mrs. Verschoyle. But tell Miss Desmond, too, will you, that I'll come to supper with her later on? It will be jollier then, when everybody knows all about it, and you and I and Miss Desmond can have a good talk over it all."

"All right," says she, giving him a last hug; "I'm off. You must have a splendid supper to-night."

She has gone quite a long way, when she is conscious of flying feet behind her.

"I say, Carry," gasps he, pulling up, and looking not only considerably blown, but convulsed with laughter. "I've had a last thought, and as all my thoughts are yours for the future, I felt I ought to tell you about it. I suppose—eh—you couldn't be married in those 'knicks' you wear in the woods, shooting the defenceless rabbits?"

He knows her well enough to turn round ab-

ruptly after this, and start back again on his homeward way with considerable speed.

"If ever—*ever*—you mention those things to me again!" calls Carry after him.

Conscious that *so* much has reached him, and that her threat being vague is all the more alarming, she sets out once more on her way to her home.

* * * * *

Richie, finding Mrs. Verschoyle at the Dower-house, has promptly stated to her his intention of marrying Carry Desmond.

"*Carry!*" says Mrs. Verschoyle, very pardonably surprised—as the relations between Carry and Richie had been treated very lightly by Lady Maria and herself, and, indeed, everybody, as not dangerous at all; as, indeed, a mere boy and boy sort of affair, not a boy and girl. Carry has been always so hopelessly queer and boyish. "You mean Carry Desmond?"

"I certainly do"—a little piqued. "I am not aware that there is another Carry anywhere near us."

"Carry!" says Mrs. Verschoyle again.

"Well! What about it?" demands Richie, now furious. "Is there another girl in the world as good as she is? or as pretty? or as charming? Come, answer me *that!*"

"No, no! My dear Richie, you———"

"Then what is it?"—violently.

"You really must not be angry with me, Richie," says Mrs. Verschoyle, giving way to the laughter that has been struggling within her. "It is only that I thought you and Carry were the last people to feel sentiment of any sort—and that you should feel it *together!*" Here her laughter increases. "And Carry, of all people! But, my dear boy, are you *sure?* Carry has been adamant up to this. Are you *sure* she will marry you?"

"Oh, rot!" says Mr. Amyot, marching angrily out of the room, which naturally puts an end to the interview; though I am bound to say that Mrs. Verschoyle runs after him, subduing her unholy mirth, and patches up the quarrel so well that it never breaks out again. She tells him, indeed (which is quite the truth), that she would rather receive Carry as a cousin than anyone else she knows, and that she will go to her to-morrow to pay her a formal call of congratulation, and that Lady Maria shall go with her.

---

## CHAPTER XXIX.

"Marvel no more altho'
The songs I sing do mone,
For other lyfe than wo
I never proued none.
And in my hart also
Is graven with letters depe,
A thousand sighs and mo:
A flood of tears to wepe."

"THE best-laid schemes o' mice and men gang aft agley," but not Dicky's! His small manœuvre comes to a successful conclusion. He had dropped a seemingly idle word or two to Cecil as to the beauty of the sky just now at six o'clock, and especially as to its charm in the Fir Wood where the opening comes—the opening made by the old oak-tree that had been blasted by lightning many years ago. Cecil, whose daily ramblings are as necessary to her as they are lonely, had seemed to catch at the description. "Dear old wood!" she said; "I shall certainly walk there to-morrow. I have not been there for a week, and I used to be so fond of it. I am fickle in my affections, perhaps." All this had been said at dinner, and involuntarily her eyes travelled to Anthony when she used the word "fickle."

He, however, seemed entirely taken up with his

fish, and looked as though utterly unconscious of anything she had said. Yet, no little word that fell from her lips was unheard by him, and that expression, "Dear old wood!" had given him a ridiculous thrill of joy. She could love his place, then, even if she could not love him. Her prison was not altogether hideous to her! And "fickle"—what had she meant by that? A chance word, no doubt. She had not been fickle to Fenton, at all events—with a grim smile. And again . . . She would go to the Fir Wood to-morrow at six o'clock. . . . To-morrow at six. . . .

* * * * *

The light is growing softer in the heavens, a little more delicately pink, as Cecil Verschoyle draws near that part of the Fir Wood where the gaunt old oak, that had been struck to the ground by lightning on one awful night in the sixties, now lifts its mighty trunk, as if in appeal, to the heaven above it.

A figure standing near the oak gives her pause. It is not . . . of *course* it is not . . . but how like Miss Royce!

The likeness is accentuated, and, indeed, made very clear, when the figure, slight and vigorous, comes quickly towards her from under the blighted oak.

"I have waited for you," says Maden in a dull, emotionless way.

"Miss Royce!"

Cecil's face shows extreme astonishment, no more—*at first!*

"Mr. Browne told me," goes on Maden evenly, "that there might be a chance of your coming here to-day. That was why I waited; I wished to speak to you."

The small, dark, shapely head is held very high. She glances at Cecil through half-closed but very resolute eyes. There is no shame, no remorse, no contrition, in those strange, dark eyes.

"To speak to me," repeats Cecil gently. She had always felt sorry for the girl in the past; she feels sorry for her now. "If I can help you, I——"

"No one can help me!" cries the other fiercely —"no one under God's heaven."

It is an outburst, a storm of passion, as quickly come as gone.

Then, in a twinkling as it were, the queer, versatile character changes once again, and with cold, insolent eyes she confronts Cecil.

"It is *I* who would help *you!*" says she.

There is a pause.

Cecil, though really she has not moved, seems to have taken a step backward, so great is her feeling of repulsion. Her usually gentle air takes now a tinge of hauteur.

"To help *me!* I hardly understand. I am sure"

—gravely—"you mean to be kind; but I require no help from anyone."

"And certainly not from me, you would add. Still, the mouse once helped the lion," says Miss Royce, with a bitter little smile. "Well, though you refuse my assistance, perhaps you will listen to what I have come here to-day to tell you."

She pauses, and Cecil's heart for a moment contracts with a sudden, vague, nameless fear. So sharp is it that she fails to notice the growing terrible agitation of the girl before her, who is compelling herself against every instinct of her nature to give voice to her own degradation, her own miserable shame, because once a man had been kind to her. There is a deeper agony in the recital, in the fact that she is about to give her wretched story to the woman whom she had always deemed her rival.

For a moment they stand facing each other—the one heart almost as much disturbed as the other. Cecil is very pale. *What* is she going to hear? From Miss Royce's whole air and manner it is impossible to believe the words she is about to utter to be of small import. *What* is it? Why has she come here? Why did she leave so silently, so mysteriously? Had Anthony ——? Oh, *dear* God! no, not *that!* Grant *so* much mercy! Oh! is not life unbearable enough without——

"What I am going to tell you," says Maden, in a voice harsh, almost uncontrollable, "I tell not for *your* sake—not to save you a pang—but because once your husband was very good to me; because he, in my hour of need, when others would have trampled on me, showed me nothing but kindness and courtesy; because he is the truest gentleman, and the most honourable, I have ever known. As for you"—slowly and with deliberation—"I have always hated you."

There is indeed in her a passion of hatred that shakes her, as she looks straight at Cecil. For a full minute their eyes meet, and then, when Cecil would have spoken, Maden brushes her aside, as it were, by a wild gesture, and plunges madly into the sad—the cruel—details of her life's story.

With dreadful calm—with cruel calm to herself—she tells it, holding back nothing, suppressing nothing, and always very quiet in the narration of it. Once only she loses herself, and that is during her account, scant now and very brief, of her interview with Anthony—of that past sad night when she stepped into his library unawares, that night when he pledged her his word that he would never betray the secret she had entrusted to his care.

It is, indeed, at the moment when she talks of Anthony that first her strange, callous manner changes. The whole past rises before her then—

that scene in the library, and Anthony offering to send her to the train in his own carriage.

"You! You!" She turns like a small fury upon Cecil. "Who are you, that you should make that man's life a misery to him? That man, your husband, of whom"—passionately—"you are altogether unworthy. Oh, I know—I have heard everything! He *did* burn that letter; he destroyed it, and he did *well* in the doing of it. He gave up his own honour to save *you*—you, who are so unworthy! I tell you I have heard *all,* and"—a little wildly—"the knowledge has driven me to"—she grows ghastly pale—"to the lowering of myself before you like this. He——"

She breaks off abruptly, sobbing wildly in the very madness of her passion and despair. That *this* woman should reject a love for which most women would be thankful, whilst she, *she,* should be rejected by him to whom she has given *all*—her youth, her love, her devotion—stands out like a red blot upon the map of her existence.

A sort of blind rage possesses her.

"Why don't you speak?" cries she fiercely. "Has the truth been too much for you? Have you only *now* learnt the value of the man who is so high above you in all ways, and whose life you have made a torment to him?"

"You forget," begins Cecil faintly; but the other will not hear her.

"I never forget!"—vehemently. *"Who does?* I always remember. I"—she stops and sighs heavily, mournfully—"I shall remember your husband until the grave closes over me." She stops again, and again sighs. "That will be soon . . . I pray. He"—slowly—"gave me his oath to hide my wretched secret, and he kept it—kept it, even when his own happiness was in question. For"—turning to Cecil—"he *does* love you; loves you"—with a most mournful break in her voice—"as a woman should thank God that she *is* loved!"

She waits a moment, but Cecil says nothing. In truth, she has been a little deaf to Miss Royce's last words, her former ones still ringing in her mind. A great peace has fallen upon her; the late dreadful turmoil of her mind is now at rest. "The most honourable man!"

"To me, an outcast," goes on Maden, with hasty, trembling breath, "he kept his word. To me, whom almost anyone else in the wide world would have ordered out of this house. But *he* gave me house-room, and welcome, and kindly attentions. Oh"—passionately—"if all men were like him!" She breaks off abruptly, as though words are too few to tell her meaning. "He gave me wine," she goes on presently, her voice low and faint, "and food.

He feared I was cold, and would have had me draw nearer to the fire. He would even have sent me in his own carriage to the train. All that"—she presses her hands to her eyes—"was nothing beside—— You see"—with a choking sob—"what I always think of is, that not once—not *once*—during the recital of my wretched story—and I told him all, *all*—did he cast one glance of scorn at me. He"—sobbing bitterly now—"was *sorry* for me. I could see that, though even *that* he tried to keep back lest it should hurt me. But for the rest . . . if I had been the best woman on earth—the most honoured of his acquaintance—he could not have treated me with greater courtesy. *Me! Me!*"

She stops, trembling from head to foot, then clasps her hands against her breast.

"Oh, my God!" says she, with a sudden sharp cry. "How I have requited him!"

She is crying now most desolately, poor thing!

"Don't cry like that—don't!" cries Cecil suddenly.

She is very white. Oh, how she has misjudged and bitterly wronged the man whose only fault arose out of loving her too well! And *was* it a fault?

"It is a relief," says Miss Royce, with a still, sullen air. "Sometimes I cannot cry. Now you know all, Mrs. Verschoyle—how I have wronged you, hurt you, destroyed all your married happiness!"

"Oh no"—faintly—"not all! I pray God not all."

An anguished expression grows upon Cecil's face.

"If I *could* pray, that would be my prayer, too," says the girl, "because your happiness involves *his*. But"—forlornly—"I never pray now. It has been all my fault—I know that. Still . . . I have suffered for it, and"—slowly, miserably hopelessly—"shall always suffer."

She looks steadily for a moment at Cecil, then, with a little gesture that *might* be a farewell, turns away and walks rapidly in the direction that will lead her from the Fir Wood to the open road beyond.

"Where are you going?" cries Cecil, quickly.

Miss Royce glances back.

"To"—grimly—"find *him!*"

"Oh! but not *now*"—with earnest entreaty; "you look tired—ill. Miss Royce"—she goes to her, and, taking her hand, holds it with an eager pressure. "Miss Royce, you *must* not go to-night. Oh, my poor girl!"—she draws her to her—"stay with me and get rest and strength."

"Stay with *you!*" The girl recoils from her, her face the colour of death. "You ask me to stay beneath *your* roof!" She leans forward as if to get a clearer view of Cecil's face. "Does that mean"—

faintly—"that you could forgive me?" Here she turns aside, poor soul! as if shrinking from the audacious thought conveyed in her words. "No, no" —in a stifled way—"that would be impossible!"

"Nothing is impossible," says Cecil, very gently, still holding her hand. "You have, I know, injured me in the past, but you have given me courage, hope, faith for the future. You have given me what no one else on earth could—renewed belief in the goodness of the man I have married."

"To have doubted *him!*"

Miss Royce's voice is so low—it is, indeed, more a whisper to herself than anything else—that only Cecil could have heard it.

"Yes, I know. My sin"—tremulously—"is greater than yours, and yet I dare to dream of forgiveness. You have lifted a load from my heart, and"—a little brokenly—"even if my husband can *not* forgive me, still, I owe you a debt of gratitude. Do you know" —softly—"I have prayed on my knees night by night for the knowledge you have given me to-day, little thinking that *you* would be the one to set my heart at rest."

Miss Royce, whose hand up to this has been lying passively in Cecil's kindly grasp, now tightens her fingers on hers with a vehemence that is full of passionate hope.

"You love *him,* then—your husband? Not—the other?"

"My husband," says Cecil faintly, "and no other."

"Ah!"—with a little wild laugh—"then you *can* forgive."

"There shall be no question of forgiveness between us two," says Cecil firmly.

"You forget——"

"I forget all but the one great thing—that you have given me hope when hope seemed dead."

Suddenly Maden flings herself on her knees before her, and clasping her knees, buries her face in the folds of her dress.

"Oh, to be like you!" she whispers, in the saddest, the most forlorn way. Her voice, her whole air, her very position, suggests that most terrible of all words—forsaken! "And yet"—clinging closer—"if you knew *all* you might well pity me. My father—even my mother—forsook me! I was a burden to them, so one night they left me alone—a little child, a mere baby—in the street. A good woman found me—tired, weeping in an archway—lost! . . . Lost!"—with indescribable bitterness—"as I have ever been—as I am now—for ever! She took me home, and sent me to an industrial school. I seldom saw her, though she was my protectress. You see, nobody—not even *she*—cared for me. She

got me work later on, but died a month after I came here to be governess to Jinnie."

"And your parents?"

Cecil has drawn her up to her feet, and is looking at her anxiously, kindly.

"I heard of them once—twice. As years went by they . . . were well to do, at all events."

"Then why not———"

"They cast *me* off," interrupts the girl with indescribable hauteur, "and I cast *them* off—for ever!"

"Poor, poor child!" says Cecil, thinking of—seeing—the figure of the little forsaken one, running here and there terrified in the wide wilderness of the London streets.

"Mrs. Verschoyle," says the girl, her strange black eyes glowing with a sudden fervour, "I think God will love *you* always; as for me, I was foredoomed. Do you know what my *real* name is? Maden you have always heard, but that was because I was ashamed of the other. No; don't touch me! They christened me"—she shrinks backwards, and covers her face with her hands—"Magdalen!"

A deep, terrible sigh breaks from the hidden lips.

"See how I have fulfilled my destiny!"

There is a moment's dreadful pause. Then Cecil, going quickly to her, in the great beauty of her nature, takes her in her arms.

"All that is as nothing," says she. "*One* fault! *One!* And to be condemned for ever! No; it is unjust."

"It is *just,*" says the girl with strange solemnity. "I have sinned, and I am condemned, and my sin has found me out. I told you I had suffered. Who" —wildly—"*who* has suffered as I have done? He—the man I loved—the man"—passionately—"I *love,* and shall love for ever—he——" She stops dead short. "He cares nothing for me now," says she in a low tone, cruel in the intensity of its hopeless misery. "He has forgotten . . . the old days . . . my love for him. Mrs. Verschoyle"—bursting out madly—"if hell isn't worse than what I have been enduring for the past six months, I think"—with a wan smile—"I shall be able to bear it!"

"You shall not go *there,*" says Cecil, holding her with her arms, "if I can prevent it. Come back with me now, and I——"

"No!" She breaks away violently. "I cannot —I will not—go with you. Mrs. Verschoyle, don't think me ungrateful. It is only . . . that——"

She fails to go on.

"At least, you will tell me where you are going? You will give me your address?" says Cecil, very gently.

"For to-night, yes; and—if you will deign to write to me, I shall let you know where I am from

time to time. I want to know"—earnestly—"that all is well with—Mr. Verschoyle"—she hesitates; the old hate dies hard, but at this, the last, the supreme moment, she conquers it—"and with you, too."

"I shall write," says Cecil.

For a moment they stand so, a film of tears making each face dim to the other. Then Cecil, whose nature is the larger, leans forward and presses a kiss upon Miss Royce's cheek. She hardly knows if it is returned, but the girl's fingers have tightened on her arm, and her eyes are eloquent with emotion as she releases herself. She turns at once.

A little later the mists of the growing night swallow her up.

## CHAPTER XXX.

"I will face thy wrath, though it bite as a sword."

Cecil, having waited to see the last of the little slim figure as it disappeared round the wooded corner, turns slowly homewards. A turn in the trees brings her, to her horror, her dismay, face to face with Anthony. He had remembered that conversation last night, and had come here with an undeveloped hope of being allowed to walk back with her. He comes quickly forward.

"Who was that you were speaking to?" asks he.

"Miss Royce."

She speaks breathlessly. Her late emotion is still heavy upon her; and to meet *him*—now—of *all* people in the world!

"Miss Royce! What brought *her* here? And to-day of all days!" He looks astonished. "Did she come to tell you, then?"

He speaks quite casually, with considerable surprise, but nothing very much out of the way.

Cecil lifts her large, excited eyes to his. Does he *know* . . . and yet speak like this?

"Yes, she came to tell me."

"But"—puzzled—"why *you?* I quite understood she had an undying dislike to you."

"Dislike or no dislike," cries Cecil vehemently, "surely I was the first person who should be told—who should have been told long ago. It was cruel, wicked, to keep me in the dark."

Verschoyle's face grows cold.

"True; you should indeed have been the first to hear of it, your interest in Fenton being so deep."

"Interest in him—a man who——"

"A man whom you loved!" His tone is contemptuous.

"*Did* I ever love him?" says she miserably.

She has lifted her eyes to the good, strong, *not* handsome, but distinctly well-bred face above her,

and an agony of regret wakes within her heart. Oh, it is *this* man she loves.

"Not a smaller soul,
Nor Lancelot, nor another."

Oh, to what low depths she must have fallen to have even believed that once she did love Sidney! . . . And yet she *had* loved him—in a sense.

"I leave that to you," says Verschoyle coldly, indifferently.

"Oh, don't *cover* me with shame!" cries she, her mind half mad as she dwells on Maden's late revelations. "I *could* not have loved him—I *could* not!"

"Your agitation"—with a bitter smile—"belies your words; it argues otherwise. This news of his intended marriage with Miss Royce—a very respectable step on his part, in my opinion—has evidently upset you."

"*His marriage*—with Miss Royce—Anthony!" She takes a step nearer to him. "*Is* he going to marry her?"

"So it seems. I am sorry"—with a cynical lifting of his shoulders, "to *confirm* the bad news she has evidently told you, but it is quite true. It appears from a letter of his that I got by this afternoon's post that he has come in for a legacy of two or three thousand pounds. A small thing, but . . . well, it opens out possibilities in other lands. Aus-

tralia is the land, I think; and he tells me he means to marry Miss Royce and take her out there with him."

"To marry her!" repeats Cecil, as if dazed.

"No doubt"—with a very unpleasant smile—"you are surprised; but, you know, 'Men are constant never.' This fact of his marrying may surprise you—distress you, even"—mockingly. "But what surprises *me* is, how did Miss Royce hear of the money left him, and his decision with regard to her? The news is not really twenty-four hours old, and he said in his letter to me he had not yet been able to communicate with her, because he did not know where she was. Yet, as you say, she came here to-day to tell you all about it."

"No, no," says Cecil, her voice low and choking; "it was not *that* she came to tell me."

"What, then, if I may presume"—with lifted brows—"to ask?"

"She came to tell me"—she pauses and struggles with herself—"*all!*"

"She told you?" His face has changed to a dull red.

"*All*"—faintly.

Verschoyle makes a strange gesture. He walks away a yard or so and stands a while, and then comes back to her.

"It is too late," says he.

"I know it." The little unborn hope that was in her mind now dies. No; he will never forgive. "I do not hope for forgiveness, but"—in a stifled tone—"grant me justice at least." She steps nearer to him, and holds out her hands, supplicating him. "Surely, *surely* I should have been *told,*" says she, her lovely eyes resting upon his, reproach in their depths. "I was your wife—I had a full right to your confidence. However sacred your promise was to that unhappy girl, still . . . I mean"—stammering nervously—"*my* happiness should have been more to you than hers."

"I could not see that your happiness was involved"—coldly.

"You *must* have seen it. "How"—passionately—"could any woman know happiness, living with a man whose honour she had just cause to doubt? I *entreated* you that night—you remember—for an explanation, and you refused to give it. What could your refusal seem to me but confirmation of your guilt? Oh, I should—I *should* have been told. I have not been treated well, Anthony—not fairly. I am not pleading with you; I am only stating my case, as it seems to me. Oh, I know"—with vehement impatience—"I *know* the ordinary codes of honour—a promise, a word given, is not to be revoked; but all these past months . . . surely you

might have found some means of destroying the terrible doubt that was in my heart."

"Belief!"—bitterly.

"As you will; that does not alter the question. But when I was your wife——"

"You"—he interrupts her contemptuously—"were *never* my wife." He waits for an answer, but none coming, he goes on: "Not for one moment during the farce of our married life have you ever, by word or sign, shown yourself sympathetic to me. On the evening of our marriage-day, when you discovered that I had withheld the letter that would have wedded you to the profligate and scoundrel whom you loved——"

"That is not true——"

"You cast me off. *What* is not true?" cries he, turning upon her with ill-subdued rage within his eyes. "That you did not love him?"

"Not then"—faintly; "perhaps before—I——"

"Pshaw!"—savagely. "You, who are so desirous for honour at all hazards, see that you do not perjure yourself! See, too"—disdainfully—"that you do not act the hypocrite."

"You are going a little too far," says she in a low tone.

"I would only warn you not to pretend to a friendship for me—now the truth has been laid bare—that you never felt."

"I never pretend to anything," returns she haughtily. "I desire only to apologise to you for any annoyance I may have caused you in the past; to acknowledge I was entirely wrong in my judgment of you; to acknowledge, also, my sense of your kindness, your nobility, to that poor girl on the night when . . . she found herself abandoned . . . and for *me!*"

"*And for you!* You find solace in that thought?" says he.

It is not a good thing to say; it is, indeed, a disgraceful thing. But the man's heart is sore within him, and he speaks out of the bitterness of it.

"That is unworthy of you," returns she quietly, though her face is very pale. "I think you will be sorry for it by-and-by. If you will not accept my apology, Anthony, nothing more need be said. And, indeed"—calmly now, and with admirable indifference, seeing that her heart is in mad revolt—"I am thinking more of the poor girl who has just left me than of you or my affairs. Her face haunts me. What terrible misery she has endured! What treachery! What deceit!"

Verschoyle regards her with a grim smile.

"And the traitor, the deceiver, is the man whose lightest suggestion you allowed to overweight your many years' knowledge of me and of my character."

"You make it very hard for me," says she. "You will not accept the grief, the remorse, I feel. Are they not abject enough? You have refused me your forgiveness; yet only to-day I knew all—only to-day Miss Royce laid bare to me her miserable story, and told me of how you—you alone had helped her."

"Any man on earth would have helped her under the circumstances. I beg"—with a cynical smile—"you will not put me on a pedestal for so small an act of courtesy."

"It was not so small." She looks at him very gently, if coldly; and he looks back at her with a miserable rage in his eyes. "You kept her secret all these months against your own interest, your own happiness."

"How do you know that?" says he. It is even a crueller thrust than the last, but his heart, half broken for six months, strikes now against the thought of hope and comfort. "You have found out to-day that I am not altogether vile," says he, "but you have found it out six months too late. You accuse me of keeping you in the dark, of refusing to confide in"—with a short and bitter laugh—"my wife! And there is a great deal in what you say. I could have done all that. I could have betrayed to you the infamy of the man you loved, the man"—fiercely—"you *love*. I could have broken my promise to that

unhappy girl; but for *what?* . . . For you! *You,* who scorned, rejected me; who consented to marry me without loving me, and who, at one word from the man you *did* love, flung me aside like an old letter."

"You will misjudge me to the end, I know."

"I should not"—with a contemptuous smile—"presume to judge you. Consider how far wiser your judgment of Fenton was than mine. For example, *you* saw some grains of virtue in him; I did not. And yet he is now going to marry Miss Royce, and of his own free will, too. To retrieve a fault is to have it half condoned. Fenton must now be stamped as a model of all the virtues; and you alone read him rightly from the first. Who am I, that I should impugn your powers of judgment?" He laughs a little harshly.

"I think it will be better to say nothing more," says Cecil gently, but with dignity. "And yet a last word *must* be said. The evening of the day we were married, Anthony, you suggested a separation. . . . I would not hear of it *then*—but *now?*"

There is a long, an eloquent pause. "It shall be as you wish this time," says he.

He turns abruptly, and, striding across the meadow on his left, is soon lost to view.

---

## CHAPTER XXXI.

"Ah, when shades fell to light succeeding,
I scarcely dared look round:
'Love lies bleeding' was all my pleading;
Heart's ease I found"

CECIL had dressed for dinner, and then sent a message to say she would not be down; she had a headache, she told her maid—a bad headache—and there was no untruth in her words. To meet him face to face, on such a conventional occasion, with all these tragic possibilities before her—separation from him, condemnation by her friends, isolation for the rest of her life—was impossible to her. And in the growing moonlight of this August night she sat in the window of her room until all seemed still in the life downstairs. The movements of the servants going to and fro are now at an end, and the calm ---the peaceful silence of the cold sweet moon—seems to have fallen upon the house, and taken it into its possession.

How still, how unspeakably quiet everything is! Where can he be? In the library, perhaps. Thinking—thinking . . . as she is, too!

But not as she is. *His* thoughts, no doubt, are

glad—filled with joy at the knowledge that soon she will be out of his life for ever. Gone! Put aside! A woman to be remembered with hatred, if remembered at all.

And yet once he had loved her! And with a great love! . . . Oh, if she had only known! Was ever woman so cruelly treated? Did ever woman so cruelly treat a man who loved her?

Death is a good thing sometimes.

The night attracts her. Rising languidly, she covers her neck and arms with a little soft cloak of white silk, and, going downstairs, walks into a dainty pleasaunce of many-coloured beds.

"The silent night, and this fair moon,
And these, the gems of heaven, her starry train,"

seem to lay the gentle hand of healing on her troubled spirit.

With a sigh she passes by the beds of sleeping flowers, and, skirting the eastern side of the lake, passes into a larger garden beyond, and so into the shrubbery.

Almost with her foot upon the entrance to it she stops, feeling as if every drop of blood in her body has ceased to flow. There, in the moonlight, stretched at full length upon the warm sward, lies Verschoyle, fast asleep.

At first the knowledge that he is sleeping does

not come to her, and the silent, motionless figure strikes her with dread. The one thought, *death,* is uppermost.

Then reason returns to her; her pulses now beat fast and furiously, and with silent but quick steps she advances to his side.

Presently she drops upon her knees and, bending over him, looks with sad eyes upon his face. Truth, honesty, earnestness—all these are writ large upon it. But in deeper print than all the rest suffering stands out.

Remorse almost overwhelms her as she gazes. It is *she* who has brought him to this. It is she who has destroyed his life. It is because of her, whom he has loved, that grief thus mars him.

She leans closer—closer still. . . . He is asleep. He will not know. Closer again, and now her lips have pressed with eager swiftness the closed lids.

Soft as the pressure is, it rouses him. He opens his eyes, and she, transfixed by fear of her own daring, still remains leaning over him, her eyes meeting his. In his half-consciousness—seeing those dear eyes so near him—he flings out his arms to catch her.

Cecil's breath comes quickly. Ah, he *does* love her still, then! He *does!* And even when, as all his senses in a second more return to him, he draws back the caressing arms, and springs quickly to his

feet, she does not feel daunted. His *first* thought on waking had meant love for her; his second . . . But "first thoughts are truest," though "second thoughts" *may* be "best."

He has risen to his feet, but she still remains upon her knees. The moonlight is full upon her, lighting up her beautiful face, and showing the tears that sparkle in her heavy eyes.

"What brought you here?" asks he unsteadily.

"I don't know. Chance, perhaps. Or God!" She makes a little gesture. "Anthony . . . forgive me!"

"Don't kneel there," says he hoarsely.

"*Let* me! It is my proper place!" There is indescribable dignity in her whole air, in spite of her lowly posture. "Anthony! *Try* to forgive me!"

Stooping, he draws her up, almost roughly, to her feet.

"It is hard!" says he, in a stifled tone. "How can I forgive you? How can you dare ask for forgiveness! Do you know what I have suffered during all these past interminable months?" His voice is trembling with a sort of smothered rage and passion and despair.

"If anyone could know it, I am that one," says she. She presses her hand involuntarily against her breast, as though to still some dreadful pain. "I . . . suffered too."

"Your suffering"—sternly—"was of your own making."

"Does that make it the less bitter?" cries she, and then suddenly, as if realising that all hope is at an end, that (his tone being so cold and unforgiving) she has indeed worked out her own undoing, that she has killed his love for her, she bursts into tears, sobbing pitifully.

"Oh, it is all over!" cries she. "I have said all I can. I have said I was sorry. I have said everything. . . . But you will not forgive me."

"How can you expect it!" exclaims he passionately.

And yet, when now she turns away, with a heart-broken gesture of farewell, his arms all at once close round her, holding her, forbidding her to go.

"You have scorned me. You have trodden me under foot. You don't deserve that I——"

"I know it." She is clinging to him.

"Just now I heard you say"—one of his arms has slipped round her white neck, from which the silken cloak has fallen to the ground, leaving her beautiful naked arms and throat free to the moonbeams—"that you had said *everything* to me. One thing you have never said—that you love me."

"Oh, I do—I do! I was mad—I was wicked! Oh, darling, *darling,* try to love me again!"

## CHAPTER XXXII.

"Now all is said, and all being said . . ."

A FEW days later, Mr. Browne, who is now in the safe shelter of the Engadine, having found his attentions to the fair Ethel leading to very undesired results, receives the following letter:

"The Towers,
"*Friday*.

"DEAR, GOOD DICKY——"

"She must be *mad,* whoever she is," says Dicky to himself, when he gazes, with an astonished eye, on the second adjective. "But they are all awfully mad, as a rule."

Then he glances, for curiosity's sake, at the address of the sender of this remarkable tribute to his unknown virtues, and, saying, "Oh, my goodness!" or something worse, sets his mind to the reading of the letter.

"DEAR, GOOD DICKY,

"I now know what you meant by sending me to see the heavens from the old oak-tree. It was to

give *me* heaven! Can't I give *you* something, you best of friends?

"Always yours,

"CECIL VERSCHOYLE."

"So *that's* all right!" says Mr. Browne, with a sigh of relief. "I feel as if I ought to send 'em a second wedding-present. Might take it badly, though." He gets up. "Wonder what the deuce they are going to give us for breakfast to-day? It's been the same old game for the past week. I'll cut it if there isn't any change this morning." He drums idly upon the table near him. "By George! but I'm glad about old Tony!" says he.

**THE END.**

PRINTING OFFICE OF THE PUBLISHER.

March 1896.

# Tauchnitz Edition.

---

Latest Volumes:

(*Continued from page 2 of cover.*)

## Casa Braccio.

A New Novel by **F. Marion Crawford.**

2 vols.

## Toxin and other Papers.

The Newest Volume.

By **Ouida.**

## The Professor's Experiment.

A New Novel by Mrs. **Hungerford.**

2 vols.

## The Chronicles of Count Antonio.

A New Novel by **Anthony Hope.**

1 vol.

## Jude the Obscure.

A New Novel by **Thomas Hardy.**

2 vols.

## Roman Gossip.

A New Work by **Frances Minto Elliot.**

1 vol.

(*Continued on last page of cover.*)

March 1896.

# Tauchnitz Edition.

---

## Latest Volumes:

(*Continued from page 3 of cover.*)

## Miss Devereux
### of the Mariquita.

A New Novel by **Richard Henry Savage.**

2 vols.

## In a Hollow of the Hills, etc.

The Newest Stories by **Bret Harte.**

1 vol.

## The Sorrows of Satan.

A New Novel by **Marie Corelli.**

2 vols.

## Teuton Studies.

A New Work by **Sidney Whitman.**

1 vol.

## The Red Cockade.

A New Novel by **Stanley J. Weyman.**

2 vols.

## The Dancer in Yellow.

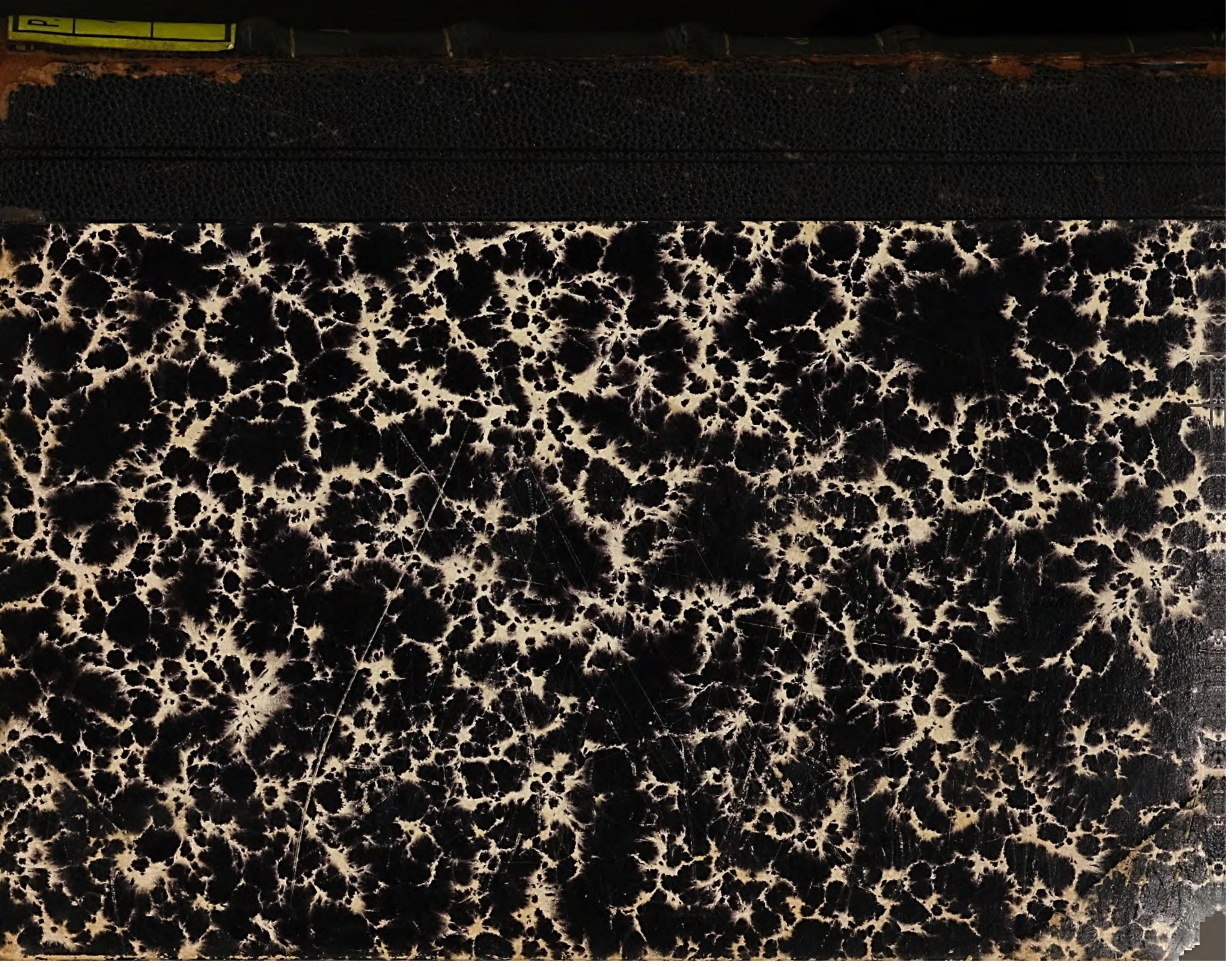
A New Novel by **W. E. Norris.**

1 vol.

---

*The Tauchnitz Edition is to be had of all Booksellers and Railway Libraries on the Continent, price ℳ 1,60. or 2 francs per volume. A complete Catalogue of the Tauchnitz Edition is attached to this work.*

F.X.BEER, Kgl. Hofbuchbinder
MÜNCHEN
Weinstrasse Nro 18/II



BSB Bayerische StaatsBibliothek

MDZ Münchener DigitalisierungsZentrum Digitale Bibliothek

Hungerford, Margaret Wolfe

A point of conscience

Bd.: 2

1896

P.o.angl. 16 r-57
urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb11826578-7